California Holocaust Memorial Week

April 12 – April 18, 2010

Assemblymember Ira Ruskin
21st Assembly District

Assemblymember Marty Block
78th Assembly District

Stan Felson

Leon Berliner with
Kai Neander

Marthe Cohn with Sarah Sax

Michael Zelon with Quesia Alcaraz

Helen and Leonard Fixler

Dr. William Z. Good

April 19, 2010

Dear Friends,

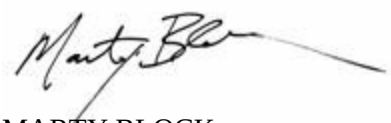
We are proud to present the 2010 California Holocaust Memorial Book. For the past seven years, the California State Assembly has honored survivors during California Holocaust Memorial Week in April. Through this project, California extols the lives and experiences of the survivors of the Holocaust, gives remembrance to the millions who lost their lives, and helps to ensure that people understand the horrors of genocide. We are excited to introduce a new dimension to this project; the inclusion of oral histories from World War II veterans who liberated the concentration camps in Europe.

Inside this book you will find powerful portrayals of courage and survival during one of human history's most horrific periods. Students participating in this project met individually with Holocaust survivors, veteran liberators and others throughout the State of California, to learn their stories and recount them in the essays presented here. Through interviews with survivors many young Californians gained an expanded appreciation for the courage of Holocaust survivors who bravely endured so much suffering. Others came to understand what our nation's veterans witnessed when they heroically liberated concentration camps throughout Europe. The courage of survivors and liberators will endure through the stories told in this book.

Survivors and veterans from throughout California are invited to sit with Assemblymembers on the Assembly floor during the Holocaust Memorial Ceremony.

We are honored to have had the opportunity to coordinate this project, and we appreciate the support and participation of the survivors, veterans, students and our colleagues. We are confident that this project will continue to thrive, as we celebrate those who have survived to tell their stories, promote the need for tolerance in society and ensure that the Holocaust is never forgotten.

Sincerely,



MARTY BLOCK
Assemblymember, *78th District*

IRA RUSKIN
Assemblymember, *21st District*

Directory

Herbert Barasch	3
Miriam Bell	71
Leon Berliner	55
Irma Broclawski	15
Horst Cahn	193
Jose Castro	23
Marthe Cohn	153
Mary Dinits	159
Emery Fabri	61
Stan Felson	99
Helen Fixler	205
Leonard Fixler	207
Anshel Fried	161
Robert Geminder	89
Gitta Ginsberg	77
William Z. Good, M.D.	105
John S. Gordon	79
Ernst Hacker	33
Jacob Harari	199
Liz Igra	135
Jack Illes	123
Jeff Imas	27
Esther Jachimowicz	165
Wilfred "Bill" Kay	127
Judith Kenedi	147
Ezra Klug	51
Steven Kovary	141
Eda Lew Balsam	187
Henry Libicki	131
Bernard Marks	117
Benjamin Midler	83
John Odenheimer	7
Harry Recht	167
Sally Recht	171
Joe Rivas	221
Inge Rosenthal	65
Lou Schotland	45
Sam Harry Stone	181
Susanne	215
Renee Tully	95
Ellen van Creveld	111
Tauba Weiss	175
Gussie Zaks	11
Michael Zelon	39

Directory by Member

Assemblymember Ira Ruskin
Beginning on page 1

Herbert Barasch
John Odenheimer

Assemblymember Marty Block
Beginning on page 9

Gussie Zaks

Assemblymember Tom Ammiano
Beginning on page 13

Irma Broclawski

Assemblymember Juan Arambula
Beginning on page 21

Jose Castro

Assemblymember Jim Beall, Jr.
Beginning on page 25

Jeff Imas

Assemblymember Bob Blumenfield
Beginning on page 31

Ernst Hacker

Assemblymember Steven C. Bradford
Beginning on page 37

Michael Zelon

Assemblymember Julia Brownley
Beginning on page 43

Lou Schotland

Assemblymember Joan Buchanan
Beginning on page 49

Ezra Klug

Assemblymember Wesley Chesbro
Beginning on page 53

Leon Berliner

Assemblymember Joe Coto
Beginning on page 59

Emery Fabri
Inge Rosenthal

Assemblymember Mike Feuer
Beginning on page 69

Miriam Bell
Gitta Ginsberg
John S. Gordon

Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher
Beginning on page 81

Benjamin Midler

Assemblyman Warren Furutani
Beginning on page 87

Robert Geminder

Assemblymember Ted Gaines
Beginning on page 93

Renee Tully

Assemblymember Mary Hayashi
Beginning on page 97

Stan Felson

Assemblymember Ed Hernandez, O.D.
Beginning on page 105

William Z. Good, M.D.

Assemblymember Jerry Hill
Beginning on page 109

Ellen van Creveld

Assemblymember Alyson Huber
Beginning on page 115

Bernard Marks

Assemblymember Jared Huffman
Beginning on page 121

Jack Illes
Wilfred "Bill" Kay
Henry Libicki

Assemblymember Dave Jones
Beginning on page 133

Liz Igra

Assemblymember Ted Lieu
Beginning on page 139

Steven Kovari

Assemblymember Dan Logue
Beginning on page 145

Judith Kenedi

Assemblymember Bonnie Lowenthal
Beginning on page 149

Dr. Gunther Bauer
Marthe Cohn

Assemblywoman Fiona Ma
Beginning on page 157

Mary Dinits
Anshel Fried
Esther Jachimowicz
Harry Recht
Sally Recht
Tauba Weiss

Assemblymember Jeff Miller
Beginning on page 179

Sam Harry Stone

Assemblymember Bill Monning
Beginning on page 185

Eda Lew Balsam

Assemblymember Lori Saldaña
Beginning on page 191

Horst Cahn

Assemblymember Nancy Skinner
Beginning on page 197

Jacob Harari

Assemblymember Sandré Swanson
Beginning on page 203

Helen Fixler
Leonard Fixler

Assemblymember Tom Torlakson
Beginning on page 213

Susanne

Assemblymember Mike Villines
Beginning on page 219

Joe Rivas

Assemblymember Ira Ruskin

District 21

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Herbert Barasch — *Interviewed by Monette Clemons and Angeles Contreras*

John Odenheimer — *Interviewed by Nathan Coleman and Nicole Kowtko*

Acknowledgements

Ruth Willdorff, Survivor

Rabbi Nathaniel Ezray
Temple Beth Jacob
Redwood City, CA

Chris Kelly, Teacher
Summit Preparatory High School
Redwood City, CA

Herbert Barasch

By Monette Clemons and Angeles Contreras

As a Child

Living in Western Europe during WWII was not easy. It was a nightmare, especially if you were Jewish. This is the story of Herbert Barasch – now, a 73-year old Holocaust survivor, but then a young boy with an unknown name and an unknown future.

As a child, Herb lived amongst fellow Jews fearing for their families, lives, and futures. Born in Vienna, Austria on January 8th, 1937, Herbert was completely unfamiliar with the notion of the persecution of Jews in his nearby surroundings. His parents, already in their mid-40s, wondered about their family's safety.

There was something very wrong: the uneasy tension in the atmosphere, the bowed heads, the growing news of family members and friends disappearing in other countries, and the exaggerated number of boycotts of Jewish businesses. The persecution of Jews was nothing new. There had been Crusades as early as the 2nd Century, and the forced exile of Jews out of various lands across Europe, many of whom were ultimately killed in Germany and France. In 1873, the first acts of anti-Semitism appeared. In 1938, when Germany annexed Austria, bigger worries appeared, and more lives were at stake… Kristallnacht symbolized all of this.

Herbert's parents moved to neutral Belgium after 1938 as they had friends and family there. Belgium was safe for only one year, due to the impending arrival of the Nazis. In search of safety, Herbert's parents traveled by foot for 7 long days to Dunkirk, France, where a British fleet was providing safe transport for Jews. By the time they reached Dunkirk, the German army had occupied France. They had no choice but to return to Belgium. Upon their return, they were forced to wear yellow stars, permanently sewn onto their clothing, labeled with the German word for Jew. This way Jews could be identified easily by German Forces. This was a time when fear reigned fully; it was either obedience or death.

When the winter came, the Germans were caught off-guard, unaccustomed to such harsh conditions. When they could not get shipments of warmer garments from their own country, the Germans turned to the Jews they were persecuting. One day, a high-ranking German officer approached Herbert's uncle Harry, a "furrier" (a maker of fur coats), and bribed him with promises of safety and "guaranteed immunity" in return for fur-lined helmets and hats for the German Army. "What do I do?" Harry asked Herbert's father that night. "He promised immunity against persecutions if I made them the hats. We will all be protected." After pondering the issue for a while, Herbert's father answered, "Do it." The helmets were created, though not perfectly made. When the Jews in charge of the helmets worked, they intentionally made wrong cuts, leaving the helmets too small. "If the Germans asked for a size 8, we would give them a size 6, making them too tight," Herbert recalls. "It was sort of a small-scale rebellion."

The small-scale rebellion was short-lived, however, because a couple of weeks later, a frightful incident occurred. The Gestapo came, following orders to arrest all Jews in sight in that

neighborhood, including Herbert's mother. Herbert, a small child, pulled at the officer's sleeve, crying, "Leave my mother alone! She's sick!" The officers, however, paid no heed, and took them both away. Herbert and his mother were taken to a holding prison. Herb feels anger when he thinks about the Nazis' superior attitude towards them: how they were convinced Jews were subhuman, that there was no accountability for their actions, and that they could do whatever they pleased. Herbert remembers the large white room where they were held prisoner, with many other Jews crowded in one room together and no exits. He says his father was at work when he and his mother were taken away, so he did not know they were gone until he arrived home later that day. Desperate, Herbert's father went to his cousin, and told him about the incident. They immediately set out to find the German officer who had promised them immunity. It took a bit of effort and persuasion to get the officer to help them.

Herbert's father knew they had to act quickly to free his wife and child, because a truck came daily to the holding prison to transport all the captured Jews to a train that would ship them to a concentration camp. The German officer was able to get them released, just 5 minutes before the truck was to leave the station. He remembered the officer in charge of the prison saying, "Take these two today, I'll get two back tomorrow, and they'll all end up dead anyway." Shaking his head gravely, his eyes closing slightly before looking up, Herbert told us, "If I'd gotten on that truck, I would not be here today."

Although their escape was fortunate, the family's real trouble began now that they had no shelter or security around them. Back in their neighborhood, their apartment had been sealed, and everything had been looted. Herb's mother went around asking for help that night, but all she received in response was, "No." Everyone was too afraid of risking their own lives to help a Jew – everyone, except one woman. "I know you," said one older woman, recognizing Herbert's mother. "You can stay at my house." The old lady was a spinster, who had a small home she shared with her paralytic sister. The only problem with this arrangement was that the woman could shelter the mother and father, but the child could not stay - it would be too much of a risk. Herbert stayed with his parents and this woman for a short period of time, while his parents decided what to do. His mother, a nice-looking blonde woman with blue eyes, was able to go out at night, seeking aid out on the streets, while her husband and son stayed hidden in a cramped cellar. Finally, she found help.

During WWII, there were various secret organizations dedicated to helping persecuted Jews all across Europe. It was very dangerous to help a Jew in those times, but these people were willing to sacrifice their own lives for the greater good. The founders of the organizations wanted to help as many Jews as they could, and their best form of assistance was taking care of the children. "They believed children are our future," Herbert explains. "If anyone was going to survive, it had better be them." Herbert's parents were able to contact someone from the underground organization To Save the Children. The organizers told his parents, "If we take your son away, you will never see him again. We won't let you know where he is." This somber piece of information did not help Herbert's parents' morale, but they had to make sacrifices for their son's safety and survival. At the appointed meeting place in Brussels, a young blonde woman met them. She asked him, "What is your name?" He shyly answered, "Herbert Katz."

"Wrong," the woman replied. "Your new name is Huber Le Chat. Remember it. If anyone asks you, that is your name." Time passed, and the official appointment of Herbert's departure came. His family went to the train station in Brussels, and the same woman came to meet them. She asked, "What is your name?" yet again. This time, Herbert was prepared. "Huber Le Chat," he replied. "Bon," the woman answered. She took Herbert by the hand, and they walked off together, leaving his parents behind.

The train took them to a monastery where St. Vincent de Paul's sisters took care of the saved Jewish children in Luven, a suburb of Brussels. Herbert remembers staying with the sisters, aware that Mother Superior was the only one who actually knew where these children came from. There were six of them - each worried, anxious, and frightened. They had to listen to the bombings and the artillery guns, without their parents' to soothe them. Herbert remembers that as a child that he would think about his parents, knowing there was very little chance of ever seeing them again. He remembers that 2 or 3 times, the underground organization received news that the Germans were approaching the monastery. They sent an early message to the nuns, telling them to relocate the children while the Germans inspected the area. Herb tells us, "It wasn't safe to keep the children there when the Germans were around. It was suspicious. Sometimes, the Germans would play a game sort of like 'Simon Says' with the children. One of the soldiers would ask, 'Who speaks Yiddish?' in Yiddish, and sometimes one of the kids would slip up and respond."

Herbert lived undercover as Huber Le Chat for 3 years, until the war ended. At first, it seemed the war was *never* going to end, especially when the Germans won the Battle of the Bulge in 1945. Then the tables turned, and the Germans lost. Herbert did not know the war was over. Herbert desperately wanted to find his parents. With the help of To Save the Children, Herbert's parents were able to locate their son. They found Herbert in a field, watching the priest and a British soldier playing soccer with other children. Their ordeal was over, and the family was together once again.

Looking back at what he went through, Herbert is quite grateful he came to America, and that he was able to enjoy the rest of his time with his parents. He admires them for what they had to do to survive, and the courage and strength they demonstrated. He now lives happily with his wife, has two grown children of his own, and six grandchildren. He says that the one thing he would like people to know is that, "America is the greatest country ever, because you are able to be free and do what you want. All that killing is unnecessary."

John Odenheimer

By Nathan Coleman and Nicole Kowtko

Escape to Manila

In the temperate August of 1939, Jewish born John Odenheimer began his drawn-out journey to escape the religious torment in Germany to effectively land safely in Hong Kong, China, on September 1, 1939. This was the very same day that Germany invaded Poland and effectively began the Second World War.

Born November 12, 1920 in Karlsruhe, Germany, John led an unconventional childhood, growing up in the "Nassauer Hof"—his father's hotel serving mostly Jewish businessmen. He went to his neighborhood school, and the altruist that John is, he took his classmates, some of whom did not have enough money to buy a meal for themselves, back to his father's hotel for lunch. In high school he learned Latin and French. He perfected the later when his mother sent him to his grandmother in Paris, with whom he stayed from 1935-1936. After his return to Germany he became an apprentice cook, and eventually apprenticed under his own father at the Nassaeur Hof. At that time, many Jews in Germany were already preparing for intense emigration, and it was dangerous for the public to associate with them.

In 1935, a series of regulations known as the "Nuremberg Laws" marked the beginning of the end for the European Jews. The German government took away personal liberties and privileges that we take for granted today, such as the ability to go to the movies or use public transportation, and even their passports were marked as "Jewish" instead of "German".

For the longest time John was naïve and ignorant of current events, being only 12 years old when Hitler became Chancellor. He, like many others, believed that the flame of prejudice towards Jewish people would extinguish quickly, but "Kristallnacht" opened his eyes to the cruel reality of Jewish prosecution.

On the chill night of November 9, 1938, at 12:00 in the morning, John awoke to the unmistakable sound of glass shattering nearby. He and his brother remained frozen in their beds, but could hear their parents in the adjoining room frantically calling for the police. The police arrived quickly in response to the call and successfully broke up the first angry mob, but an hour later, even more people came. Yet again, John's parents called the police, but this time none came to their aid. Soon after, the Gestapo barged into the hotel without invitation. While John's younger brother ran into his parents' room, John fled out the other door and jumped onto the hotel's small roof.

As John crouched up on top of the hotel, trying to figure out how to escape, all of the male inhabitants of the hotel were arrested and taken to jail. Along the way, the angry mob beat one of John's family friends to death. Hours later, John snuck back into his room and slipped into his oldest clothes. He then proceeded to grab a broken table leg, and join the angry mob in the hotel's hallway, destroying his own belongings alongside the other townspeople in an attempt

to blend in. When he reached the front door, he snuck out onto the street and ran to his uncle's house, where he spent the night.

The next morning his brother and father were released from prison, though the rest remained in custody. John helped his father repair the hotel during the day and it was soon able to reopen. John slept at his uncle's house in the evening because he was too afraid to sleep in the hotel ever again.

After Kristallnacht, John realized that it was time to leave Germany. His parents were waiting to get a visa for the United States, but John decided that he couldn't stand to wait. His mother was able to get him a visa and a ticket to the Philippines, where John's uncle and cousin had emigrated years before. However, instead of traveling by liner, he traveled by plane with Lufthansa on a route that had just been mapped between Europe and Asia.

About August 15, 1939, in a Junker 52 German airplane, John flew with only two pilots and a flight engineer. They took off from Berlin, Germany, and the flight lasted a total of five days. During the trip the airplane stopped at Belgrade, Beirut, Baghdad, Basra, Jásd, Karachi, Jodhpur, Allahabad, Calcutta, Yangon, and eventually Thailand, having to land for meals since none were served on the plane. The plane landed in Bangkok, where John stayed for 10 days before taking a French aircraft to Hong Kong.

On September 1, 1939, John arrived in Hong Kong, the same day that Germany invaded Poland. Because of his German passport, he was promptly arrested by the British Police and taken to an internment camp, where he was nominated as a chef (Escape to Manila by Frank Ephraim). However, he was released two weeks later because of his American visa for the Philippines, and arrived in Manila on September 18, 1939.

After World War II ended in 1945, John worked on a ship as a night chef and landed in New York without a visa. He was held on Ellis Island for a period of six weeks, gaining freedom by paying a lawyer all of his previous earnings. He then traveled by train to San Francisco, where he worked as a chef for seven years at the Palace Hotel, Bardelli's, and Ritz Old Poodle Dog. After, he enrolled as a student at UC Berkeley. He wished to pursue Archeology and Anthropology, but upon speaking with the Vocational Services, he decided to become a social worker so that he could adequately support his family. He spent more than 30 years working for San Mateo County as a social worker for the mentally ill, but has since retired and now lives comfortably with his wife in Palo Alto. Although almost 70 years have passed since the tribulations of the Holocaust, John's memories of the infamous Kristallnacht remain with him to this day.

Assemblymember Marty Block
District 78

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Gussie Zaks *Interviewed by Celia Benchetrit*

Acknowledgements

Rabbi Simcha Weiser, Headmaster
Soille San Diego Hebrew Day School
San Diego, CA

Harriet Herman, Principal
Soille San Diego Hebrew Day School
San Diego, CA

Michael Bart
New Life Club
San Diego, CA

Gussie Zaks

By Celia Benchetrit

Gussie Zaks is from the first generation of the Holocaust survivors and was born in Poland in 1926. She lived her early life in Poland with her family in a city called Klobuck. Klobuck was the city with the highest Orthodox Jewish population in Poland. Gussie's father owned a butcher shop and she and her many siblings helped with the work. Both of her parents were born in Poland and their last name was Ungik.

Gussie Zaks experienced many situations during the Holocaust where she felt she was saved by being in the right place at the right time. Those miracles that were given to her gave her the feeling she was saved by Hashem. She felt that Hashem was always watching over her and giving her hope, much the same as Elie Wiesel wrote about in his book, "Night".

On the day the Germans came to Gussie Zak's house, she wasn't at home. She had told her mother in the morning that she wanted to do some volunteer work because she was bored. Her whole family was sent to a camp on that day. Several of her family members did not survive that camp. This was one of the first times Gussie felt that it had only been by luck or divine providence that she had not been sent to the same camp as her relatives. However, Gussie was sent later to another camp, a work camp.

During the time she spent in the work camp, she had a reputation for being a good, hard worker and was liked by the "Chief" of the camp. One Friday, going back to camp from the fields where they worked, she saw some potatoes growing nearby. "A raw potato to eat was better than an apple today." So, she told herself that on Monday she was going to get those potatoes. At lunchtime on Monday she went to get the potatoes while the SS women were resting. Gussie got lost and couldn't find the potatoes she so desperately wanted. She became very anxious and started running down a hill with the five armed SS guards watching her. A train passed by and the guards started shooting at her, thinking she was trying to escape. She was only fifteen years old and **"**didn't understand what escape meant at that time.**"** She came back to where the SS guards were and they beat her. The guards told her that, when they got back to the camp, the chief SS woman was going to read her number and she would be sent to Auschwitz**.** All the other girls said goodbye. The "Chief" of the camp told her he was very disappointed that she would try to run away. While he was telling her this, she was thinking "Who cares what he thinks? I am going to die anyhow." But, instead, he saved her life. He talked to the head woman guard of the SS and told her what a good worker Gussie was. They never called her number. The other girls in the camp waited for a week for her to be killed. They wouldn't look at her or speak to her, because they did not want to be associated with her for fear of being killed themselves.

During the interview Gussie told me; "The Holocaust can't be told one hundred percent. You had to live through it to understand." The truth of those words really made an impression on me. After each of the amazing stories she shared, she said she had her mother to thank for teaching her how to be strong and to always think of others before herself. She said if her mother

had not taught her those things, she did not believe she would be in this world today. Her mother told her; “You cannot live through yourself; you have to do mitzvoth in order to survive.”

She told me an account of how her mother lived her life and what she taught Gussie. One day Gussie was sitting on her doorstep, and saw a poor family sitting on the ground across the street from her. Gussie’s mother came out, pulled some money from her pocket, and gave the money to Gussie. Her mother told her, “Go and give the money to this poor family. You will save the girl’s life.” The oldest daughter was ill with tuberculosis and they did not have the money to take her to the hospital for treatment. When Gussie handed the money to the family, their eyes opened wide and they thanked her. The family was able to take their daughter to the hospital, although it was too late to save her.

Gussie Zaks told me how her mother would tell her that she may not be rewarded right away for good that she did, but she would be rewarded later in life or in the world to come. Gussie believes the only reason she survived the Holocaust was because of the kindness her mother taught her.

There are many other stories that she told me. I chose these because they had a meaning to me as a thirteen-year-old girl. After hearing her stories, it took awhile before I could say anything. I thought about how such a young girl experienced so much ugliness, and whether I would have been able to survive and handle the situations as well as she did. I was not able to talk or express my feelings for a while. It was too much to digest. I found it hard to know what to say to Gussie to express my feelings and admiration for her.

Gussie Zaks is an amazing person because of what she has survived and what she still accomplishes today. I was impressed that she remembers everything so well, and is able to talk to teenagers the way she would talk to her own children. Today, Gussie Zaks is eighty five years old and does volunteer work for several organizations, giving freely of her time and talents as she has done her entire life. She has made a positive difference in the lives of others. For many years, she has volunteered her time to talk about her experiences during the Holocaust with middle and high school students in San Diego County. Many mothers of students she has spoken to have called her and thanked her for being the person that changed the direction of their children’s lives.

Assemblymember Tom Ammiano
District 13

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Irma Broclawski *Interviewed by Lillian Van-Cleve*

Acknowledgements

Taylor Epstein, Supervisor of YouthFirst Programs
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco
San Francisco, CA

Brian Brown
Case Manager/ Program Coordinator, Holocaust Reparations Programs
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco
San Francisco, CA

Irma Broclawski

By Lillian Van-Cleve

Before we had even made it up to her apartment, Irma Broclawski began to speak. She looked me directly in the eye, "It is a wonder I am alive." This is very true; her concern that I fully comprehend this fact was evident. Equally striking was the emotion one could see in her eyes behind these earnest words.

In the small little town of Wisnicz lived the Ferber family. Irma was the youngest of the family's three children. She lived with her father, her mother and her two elder brothers. Her father, David Ferber, was a Jewish lawyer in their town, and a man worth noticing. He had been a Major in the Austrian army during WWI and he was a highly respected man in the community.

Irma was quite adamant that her father was "a very proud man." Meeting Irma, and hearing about her family, it became clear that he had a lot to be proud of, and that Irma was just as proud of him.

Irma Ferber Broclawski, then just Irma Ferber, led an average life. She adored her parents. Like every child, she went to school locally, made friends and lived a relatively carefree life. Life continued like this until she turned fourteen. Irma, born in 1925, celebrated her fourteenth birthday on the 25th of January. She was completely oblivious to the fact that come September, her life would change drastically. That September, the first incident that thrust her life into undesired turmoil came to pass.

Hitler took over. He invaded Poland and Nazi influence rose. David Ferber was forced to stop working. That was the end of her father's successful career. Their comfortable lifestyle ended. They lacked the means to support themselves. Living only on his former client's generosity, the family tried to make do. During the early part of the occupation, her mother, Josephina Ferber, was overheard speaking ill of Hitler. She was arrested and put in jail. Jail in those days would have horrified even the most hard-hearted person. After three months, she was unexpectedly released. When she came home, she pulled out a dull knife and showed it to her daughter. She told Irma that each day in jail, she sharpened the knife. She wanted it to be sharp enough to cut through the veins in her wrist. She had wanted to die.

Irma looked tired and heart broken as she recalled her mother telling her of her extreme resolution to commit suicide. The anguished expression that took over Irma's face was distressing in and of itself. It's not something I'll ever forget.

One day, her father innocently went to the post office to check for any correspondence from his two sons, who were then attending university. As David Ferber's Jewish religion was out in the open and widely known, he was bound to be harassed and persecuted by the Nazis. Suddenly, the nasty prejudice of a Gestapo officer reared its ugly head. Irma's father was struck with a blow to the face by the hand of this man.

Suddenly, Irma winced. It was as though she felt same strike just then as her father had so many years ago. The fact that this action was pure impulse, like she was still expecting it, was even more painful to watch.

He was put through some time in prison. The Gestapo arrested him without cause. Irma and her mother managed to pull through financially and emotionally without David, but just barely. The support and benevolence of their friends was a great help. David Ferber completed his time. His family awaited his arrival anxiously. However, upon returning home, he suffered a severe and fatal heart attack. Irma and Josephina were devastated when they lost the love, the strength and the willpower that he had inspired within them. His death inspired a fierce determination to go on and make it through the dangerous trials awaiting them.

Soon after the loss of Irma's father, the charity of their friends grew sparse, for everyone else had to tighten their belts, too. It was a struggle. The two women tried desperately to keep warm by the fireplace as winter approached. Josephina even attempted to nourish her hungry daughter with imaginative meals by reading to her from a Viennese cookbook. Josephina traveled with her daughter to Krakow, about fifty miles from their hometown. On arriving at Krakow, they were captured and put into the city's Jewish ghetto. Here, they were trapped for a number of months. Finally, they were mercifully released with the influence of a family friend by the name of Marian. Marian took them back to Wisnicz. This generous friend managed to assist them further by providing them with false papers, and so this was the birth of their new identities.

Suddenly, Irma was no longer Irma Ferber. She was now Bronislawa Jalowiecka, and five years older than Irma Ferber. She may as well have been baptized and christened as she herself was more familiar with Bronislawa's Christianity than her own Jewish religion. This was the key to her survival. It was crucial, absolute, and unquestionably necessary.

Irma, or rather Bronislawa, and her mother, now known as Rosalia Koczur, fled. In their absence, Wisnicz had become almost equally unfriendly towards Jews. The Gestapo's presence had also increased immensely. For two weeks they remained hidden in the forest, cold and hungry. They were just outside the city limits of Bohnia. However, despite their desperation and their painfully close proximity to the urban area, they had to resist their longing to enter the city and seek shelter. The thought of those houses with hearths and markets with food tortured them - so close and yet so far. They were Jews, "dirty, filthy Jews," in the words of some of the townspeople. Even with their new identities, the fear remained deep inside and they knew they were never safe.

After a few weeks, they were serendipitously rescued by a peasant, whose hospitality was a blessing. However, one afternoon, Josephina's heart filled with fear. They heard dogs raising a racket in the distance. The barks and howls were terrifying. They guessed that the son of the household had betrayed their true identity. Josephina explained to Irma that they must part ways. They were too conspicuous together. And so mother and daughter walked in separate directions. That was it - Irma was never to see her mother again.

She paused in her story and looked across the room. I followed her gaze and saw that Irma was focusing on what seemed to be a photo of her and her daughter. Irma began to explain her daughter's reaction to this part of her story. Her daughter, apparently, had been appalled at Josephina's decision to leave her daughter's side. According to Irma, her daughter did not, and would not, be able to comprehend the situation and the necessity of doing what needed to be done, regardless of the pain. I looked away from the photo and back towards Irma's face. I imagined the fear that must have taken over as she had to fend for herself at such a young age. I wondered if Irma herself totally understood and accepted her mother's decision.

Irma began her long journey to Krakow. This trip to Krakow faired no better than the last one. After only a couple of weeks, Irma was caught outside after curfew. Because of her false papers, she was not identified as a Jew and therefore was sent not to a concentration camp but to a labor camp in Germany. Without family or friends, Irma was truly alone. She was strong and she remained just as determined to keep going. Her strength allowed her to face the horrors of the Holocaust awaiting her in Germany.

At the labor camp, she began with harsh metal work that scarred her body, giving a physical presence of the scars that she sustained in her heart. During her time as a metal worker, Irma suffered through inhumane shifts. As the days went on, the shifts got drawn out, becoming longer and more exhausting. After working a twelve-hour shift, she lay down on the cold, hard cement, and covered herself with cardboard. This was how she slept. Once, she was rudely awakened by a German solider kicking the cardboard over her. He made a few nasty comments before forcing her back to work. This was how she lived.

Following this she was transferred to another labor camp in Dormagen. The work at this fabric industry for parachutes, I.G. Fraben Industries, was intense and grueling. Bronislawa Jalowiecka and one other girl were required to look over, feed, bathe and generally take care of at least 40 children, who were anywhere from six months to a year and a half. It was not easy work. The children had all been taken away from the women in the camp. The intention was to "Germanize" them.

At one point, the Germans closed down all the brothels in the area. They herded the prostitutes into the labor camps. These workers constantly made fun of Irma and her friend, and found their innocence amusing. Despite her tiring work, she still had the strength to fight this pressure and remained true to her character. This is yet another example of her resilient spirit.

Irma Broclawski turned and quietly said to me, "Don't think it was a picnic, labor camps, no." Shaking her head, she looked away. Still focusing her eyes elsewhere, she burst out, "This was how we lived. We were - like a dog! Everybody came to kick and you had no right to say... because you were scared when you opened your mouth the Germans would kill you or send you to a concentration camp."

Meanwhile, Irma's eldest brother, Arthur, joined in the military in Poland. He was wounded as a result and sent to a POW camp. His family sent him care packages whenever possible, though they never knew if the packages were received. At the time, her other brother, Edward, was on the run from the Nazis and other Polish collaborators. He eventually escaped to

Russia, or so the family had thought. One day, by coincidence, a happy coincidence, she came across her brother's friend in Dormagen on her way back to her living quarters. He told her to escape with him and go to where her brother was being held as a prisoner of war. Though she didn't know the friend and it was very dangerous, she decided to take the chance.

As she had began recalling the meeting with this friend, she looked as anxious as if she was being forced to make the decision at that very moment. She then snapped back to the present and explained the decision to go through with the shaky plan saying, "When you like your life, you will do very risky things."

So they escaped. Unbelievably, after all this time and after all they had gone through, the brother and sister were reunited. There was a catch, however. Officially, Irma Ferber was no longer Irma Ferber, the sister of Arthur Ferber. It could, under no circumstances, be discovered that they were siblings. Eventually, Arthur became concerned that the Gestapo in the area were suspicious of him, especially since he still remained Arthur Ferber, a Jewish man. Arthur managed to sneak into an office and change some of the registry and transportation papers. He succeeded in changing it so that they were both now being transported to Vienna.

Once in Vienna, Irma registered for domestic work. Arthur was very adamant that Irma was not a maid, especially not for some German woman. Still, Irma went through with it, and the siblings parted ways. Even with the harsh treatment she received from her mistress, she still remained in Vienna until it was liberated at the end of the war.

The end of WWII may have finally arrived, but the pain and anguish was not destined to end. Soviet soldiers raided and plundered a number of places. They harassed and raped a great number of women. Irma was fated to suffer through this as well. After recovering for a few months in Budapest, she traveled the difficult path to return to Poland. Her goal was to reunite with her family. She remained certain she would find them, but she was only disappointed. All Irma had left with was a ring her mother had been given when she was sixteen, and a box of family photos.

Irma recalled that her mother's brother, Joseph, and his German wife, Elisabeth, lived in Krakow. Yet again she made her way there. Upon finding her, they immediately took her in. Irma did not judge Elisabeth for her German nationality.

Now returning to her childhood, she spoke, "I was raised not to hate any race, any nation... because nobody chooses where they're born, right?"

Despite being German, Elisabeth did not endorse her fellow Germans' actions. Irma ended up living with them for several years. She soon learned the fate of her mother. Just a month before the end of the war, Josephina was betrayed and found out to be a Jew. The Gestapo shot her dead on the street. Irma had found out that her second eldest brother was herded by the Gestapo who shot him too, as he declared that he was a Jew.

Now, back in Krakow, Irma found some menial work in the city. It was there that she came across her future husband.

This was one of the only times in the interview that Irma did not appear infinitely distressed. She smiled and dreamily recalled how quickly their relationship progressed.

Unfortunately, he, too, had endured the anguish of war. He understood her pain and she his. They went on only nine dates before getting engaged. In spite of her uncle's protests that he was not the man for her niece, she went ahead and married the man she loved. They were married happily for more than half a century.

Irma stands up and walks over to a small bookshelf and motions for me to join her. She gestures to the framed picture on top of it. The picture is of her late husband. Beside the photo is a small vase with a single, red rose. This brave woman looks at her husband with love in her eyes. That she still has the capability to love despite the traumatic experiences of her younger years is miraculously wonderful.

Irma Ferber Broclawski began with the fact that it's a wonder she's alive. I think it's a wonder that she could move on from her nightmarish experience and manage to go on to have a wonderful life. Irma ends her story with tears welling up in her eyes. She hopes that I will do her story justice. Her story is one that needed to be heard and one that she needed to tell.

Assemblymember Juan Arambula

District 31

Is honored to present the story of World War II veteran

Jose Castro

Interviewed by Peter Molina and Belinda Aguilar

Jose Castro

By Peter Molina and Belinda Aguilar

Jose Castro was born in Albuquerque, NM. As a child, he worked alongside his father, picking sugar beets and cotton. He then moved to El Paso, TX in 1936, and began working for the railroad cleaning passenger trains in 1940.

Prior to joining the military, Mr. Castro did not know much about Hitler and the Nazi regime. He had read newspapers and did not know about the conflicts that initiated the war. It was not until Jose was drafted to join the military in March 1944 that he learned about the Nazis and their concentration camps, extermination camps, gas chambers, and Adolf Hitler. After joining the military, Jose was stationed in Paestum, Italy. He was later told that he was going to be with General Eisenhower. As they were heading to their destination (with General Eisenhower) the next day, they were turned back due to the terrible weather conditions. Jose indicated that there was too much snow. After being stuck in Paestum for three months, they were sent to General Patton.

Jose and his unit were ordered to pick up equipment, cars and horses that the Germans had left behind. This assignment took them seven days and seven nights to complete. During the completion of this assignment, they came across a dead GI. He also recalls coming across a bridge, halfway across the bridge they were called back because a unit before had already been through that area. There was an empty field on which they conducted a sweep and came across 70 Germans in the field that had ran out of ammunition.

While serving in World War II, he heard a lot of terrible things about the concentration camps. “I heard that they were no good, and that they were heavily guarded,” Mr. Castro mentioned. While trying to make it to the concentration camps, Joe was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge, the largest land battle in World War II where 500,000 Americans fought.

After coming back from the war, Jose Castro was recognized for serving his country and was given two *Purple Heart* awards. He was also awarded several medals in recognition of his heroism. He received his Honorable Discharge Certificate in 1945, and has been very involved in veteran issues ever since. Jose volunteered at the VA Medical Center in Fresno for over 10 years as an outreach and veteran advocate, and still participates in some of the VA events. He currently lives with his granddaughter and her family.

Through the years, Jose Castro has been very open about what he went through during World War II. “Whenever they asked, I was always willing to share my experiences with them,” he said. His favorite story is about a time when he was walking with his unit and was ordered to, “Take cover!” by his superior. He dove in to a sewage line, and when he looked up to see what was going on, a bullet hit him his helmet, where it remained lodged. After his unit took control of the situation, he went back to find the helmet, but it was gone. That helmet was important to him because it saved his life, but he was never able to find it.

When asked what he learned by being a World War II soldier, he replied, “I learned to obey my officers, take orders and execute them and to be a strong man.”

Assemblymember Jim Beall, Jr.

District 24

Is honored to present the story of
Holocaust survivor

Jeff Imas *Interviewed by Esha Roy*

Jeff Imas

By Esha Roy

Remembering the Calamity: A Memoir Through a Survivor's Eyes

Decimation. *Obliteration*. *Annihilation*. *Genocide*. These are powerful, terrifying words when used in the normal connotation. But can these terms even attempt to do justice to the excruciating experience of the Holocaust felt by so many innocent people? The persecution and subsequent extermination of the Jewish people and other minority groups by the Nazis is said to be the greatest transgression against humanity of all time. We can, however, take some small measure of comfort in knowing that we can learn a great deal from those who were able to survive such a harrowing time in our history, allowing us to never forget the brutal agony that approximately 17 million innocent people endured not even a century ago.

One such survivor, Jeff Imas, was born on November 10, 1932 in the small city of Bender, a town only 40 miles from Chişinău (Kishinyov), the capital of the Eastern European nation of Moldova. With all the men but two in his family enlisted in the Soviet Army during World War II, Jeff was raised primarily by his mother, Anna Imas and his grandmother, Seema Imas.

Though he had some idea of the impending turmoil that had started to rack Europe in the late 1930's, Jeff could not have imagined the extent of barbarianism that would soon overturn his life. He heard rumors of the war in Poland, instigated by Hitler and Nazi Germany, but Jeff really only vaguely feared an idea at the time, an unnerving reality that had not yet reached him.

Jeff was a mere nine years old when his trepidations turned into reality. His family had moved to the small city of Balta in southwestern Ukraine early in Jeff's life, and when the Germans began to rampage through the area, his family began to contemplate evacuation. One day, his family packed up what few belongings they had and took off on foot in an attempt to escape. After 20 miles of straight travel, the family found themselves on the front lines of a battle, with Romanians and Germans on one side and the Soviet Army on the other. Jeff and his family had no choice but to turn around and return to Balta.

Sometime after the family's return home, it was announced that a few blocks in Balta would be reorganized as a Jewish ghetto, emphasizing the narrowness of the persecution. A plethora of regulations was issued to the inhabitants of the new ghetto, each of which had to be followed to the letter. Each of these rules struck at the normalcy of everyday life, such as the restriction against leaving the ghetto without permission or the statute that forbid people from being able to go to the farmer's market to retrieve food. If it were not for many of their benevolent Russian neighbors who smuggled food and supplies into the city, the people would have starved. At that point, however, the force that Nazi Germany was inflicting upon Ukraine was almost superficial compared to what was to come.

The winter of 1941 to 1942 was one of the most difficult seasons experienced by the Ukrainian people in many years. It was also the first winter that the Romanians and Germans began the process of liquidation in the Jewish ghettoes.

The systematic and complete eradication of the Jews by means of extermination camps was referred to as the "Final Solution" by Nazi Germany. When the Third Reich encroached on the city of Balta, they stirred immense fears amongst the Jews and their sympathizers, yet not much understanding of their presence in the city. When amassing the incredible number of people meant to be transported to the concentration camps, the soldiers never informed the victims of their ultimate destination—rather, they detailed only how everyone should take valuables, but the Nazis' real intentions were to pilfer those valuables from the people in a few days. Herded by foot, the assembled masses marched towards an uncertain end.

During this march of death, Jeff recalled a specific moment that made his heart shudder. As they walked along, an older man began to feel tremendously ill; perhaps he had a weak heart, as he began to keel over in pain. Barbarically, the Romanian soldiers began to push and prod him, forcing him to continue marching. When he could not cooperate due to his illness, the soldiers cracked his head open with their rifles in full view of the crowd. This would prove a catastrophic foreshadowing of the future of the Jews of Balta.

On the third night of the march, a woman approached the group and notified them that the party which arrived before them had been taken to a concentration camp to be exterminated. Fearing for their lives, Jeff's family needed a way to escape. With soldiers guarding their every move, rifles pointed in every direction they turned, salvation seemed unattainable. The group was stopped in a building which was originally designed to shelter hundreds of pigs every night, and Jeff and his family found their opportunity. In Ukraine, the buildings were made of supple clay, not the concrete of modern architecture. Upon finding a small chink in the back wall, the group worked together with spoons and forks to widen the hole enough for a body to slip through. One by one, they sneaked out of the building. The family rapidly slipped through the woods to safety, traveling only at night for fear of being captured during the daylight hours. During the day, they took refuge in the haystacks that were plentiful in the countryside. After several days of insufferable travel, the family encountered a benevolent woman who took them in for the night, offering them food, warm beds, and directions on how to return to Balta. A blessing in the darkest of times, the woman's assistance allowed the group to return to their home in the ghetto, and at the time of their return, the liquidation had thankfully stopped for unknown reasons. They remained there until the end of March 1944.

Life in the ghetto was intolerable, but the Jews had no other choice but to comply with the rules established by the Nazis. Almost everyone in the ghetto was forced to work, usually for little or no remuneration. When Jeff was 10 years old, he was forced to work in a furniture factory as a gopher, with the only payment being food. Because he was a child, he was exempt from the harshest treatment and was often given simpler tasks. Life seemed to regain some semblance of normalcy, as they carried on with their daily routines.

Another situation that was truly unnerving for Jeff occurred in the ghetto when a night two or three days before liberation, two German soldiers known as "Feldjandarms" knocked on

the Imas' door. German soldiers carried an immense amount of clout in the Nazi hierarchy, even more so than the SS, the Nazi paramilitary force. Despite their fear, they noted that the knock on their door was a light tap, as opposed to the imposing pounds that generally arrived when the SS were coming to take a family away. The Feldjandarms requested permission to be housed overnight, and Jeff's family had no choice but to take them in and give up their second room. In the middle of the night, there was a tremendous knock, and two SS soldiers were at the doorstep, probably with the intent of taking the Imas family away. The higher ranking German soldiers, empathizing with the family, turned the SS soldiers away. If it were not for the small act of kindness on the part of the Feldjandarms, Jeff and his family would have been sent to their death.

Unlike numerous other victims of the Holocaust, Jeff and his family were relatively fortunate, as they were able to escape death several times and survive the war. When asked if he and the Jews of Balta continued to be religious while in captivity, Jeff explained that most everyone prayed, yet after witnessing such unspeakable horrors firsthand, they were skeptical of God. Where was God when 17 million innocents were unjustly murdered; where was he when tens of thousands of innocent children were mercilessly tortured, Jeff thought. His family was not extremely pious in their beliefs, yet being subjected to such discrimination invoked a sense of nationalism and unity in the victims in general. Having to wear the Star of David on his garments, Jeff describes his mixed feelings of both pride in this national symbol of his faith and culture and indignity in the obvious mockery of that symbol.

Today, Jeff still feels the same extreme emotions that he felt when he was a child subjected to the horrors of the Holocaust. Life after the end of the war was a relief, yet not a walk in the park. Jeff worked to help support himself and his family, eventually building up status and gaining much support financially. Jeff moved to America in 1989 with his wife Clara Imas, and his extended family, including his son and two grandchildren.

Jeff Imas' story is sobering, shocking, and terrifyingly real, and it is for these reasons that it is absolutely imperative that it be commemorated. The Holocaust was a calamity so atrocious that it would not do its victims justice to simply know the history of the period and what occurred. The stories, the experiences of the victims that encompassed the essence of the Holocaust, should be passed on and venerated from generation to generation, so that all those who died should not have gone in vain. We are lucky to have survivors like Jeff Imas to remind us of this terrible stage in our history and to prevent the repetition of another such act of hate against humanity.

Assemblymember Bob Blumenfield

District 40

Is honored to present the story of
Holocaust survivor

Ernst Hacker *Interviewed by Sheer Dadon*

Ernst Hacker

By Sheer Dadon

A-2136

How do great, strong people become only green, tattooed numbers? Jews and Europeans were friends, business partners, and neighbors. However, when Adolph Hitler stepped into the picture, everything began to change. How is it possible that decades of friendship and partnership turned to hatred in a matter of months? How could it be that young children, like Ernst Hacker, were called "Swine Jews" or "Dirty Jews" after Hitler's arrival in 1938? How were families, friendships, and marriages torn apart because of one wicked man? Sitting beside Ernst Hacker, I was asking myself those questions. It was only after I heard his touching story that I realized there is only one possible answer to those questions. Only secretly, deceivingly, and extremely gradually do humans become numbers. Ernst Hacker taught me how Hitler and the Nazis gradually took over Europe and how they affected his life.

Ernst Hacker was born in Schwarzenbach, Austria, on April 29, 1929. His father Samuel was born in Shauzenbach, and his mother, Adele Riegler, was born in Lackenbach. Ernst had a younger brother, Leo, who was born in Vienna on January 16, 1932. Ernst Hacker had a wonderful childhood until the Nazis invaded their village in 1938. He lived in a three story house that contained a bakery and a store. There was a yard and a garden with fruit trees, chickens, and horses behind his house. In Burgenland, the area that he lived in, there were only two Jewish families. Ernst's parents made sure that no non-kosher food entered their home. Later, Ernst told me that his parents even had a separate kitchen for Pesach that was closed all year round. Kosher food and Shabbat candles were brought from Vienna. However, there was no synagogue in Schwarzenbach; Ernst and his family had to travel about one hour by horse to Lackenbach, where the closest synagogue was located.

When the Nazis came into his village in 1938, things began to change. When Ernst received his report card at school, Israel was added to his name. All of his friends turned against him and called him "Swine Jew" and "Dirty Jew." They arrested his father but then said to him, "Oh, you don't look like a Jew; you can go home." In 1940, Ernst and his family had to move to Vienna, where they were forced to wear a yellow Star of David badge bearing the German word 'Jude' (Jew). There, three families, including his family, shared a three bedroom apartment. Ernst was afraid of being attacked as he walked on the streets of Vienna. Children would throw rocks at him. People who were sent to harass Jews came into Jewish stores and broke everything. There were food and coal shortages, and the possessions that were taken from them when they left for Vienna were never returned. Ernst was sent to a Jewish community school, and his father worked for the Jewish community. It was during this time that the transports started. Jews were being sent to many places, and no one knew exactly where. Soon after Ernst's Bar Mitzvah in October 1942, he and his family were sent to Theresienstadt.

The first thing that Ernst mentioned to me about the Theresienstadt ghetto was that it was a place where the Germans assembled all the Jews. Jews from Holland, France, and Germany were brought to this town, which was built like a fortress. Food was scarce, and the labor was

very difficult and intense. The Jews living in that ghetto were forced to write back to people who sent them parcels in order to make them believe everything was all right. Many people died from hunger and sickness; however, it wasn't a camp where many Jews were killed outright. From this ghetto, Jews were sent on train transports to other locations. There were Jewish police who were in charge of the ghetto. If the Germans wanted to send a transport, they came to the Jewish police and told them what day and how many Jews they wanted to transport.

Ernst's mother was ill and had an operation. At the same time, Ernst was working as a shoemaker. He had to heat an iron to wax the leather, and one day he suddenly caught on fire. His roommates were able to extinguish the fire by covering him with mattresses and covers, but his entire body was burnt and he had to use crutches. Transports continued. Ernie and his family went to the ghetto leader, Mr. Murmelstein, and asked if they could stay behind because both Ernie and his mother were sick. He responded by saying that there were too many Hackers there, so Ernst, his family, and Walter's family (his cousin) were sent to Auschwitz in May 1944. Ernst told me that it was absolutely terrible living in this ghetto, but he made sure to emphasize that the living conditions in Theresienstadt were heaven compared to what he went though afterwards. In May 1944, all hell broke loose.

Ernst and his entire family traveled for four or five days on cattle wagons. One hundred fifty or more people were put in one wagon. As Ernst described the living and sanitary conditions during these few days, I realized that from then on things would become even worse. They were given no food, and there was no place to go to the toilet. Ernst described himself and the rest of the Jews as being reduced by this cruelty to being animals. They no longer felt human. As they arrived in Auschwitz, their luggage was thrown into a pile. His father tried to keep a pot with some jewelry covered with fat, but Ernst knew that the Germans would kill his father, so he convinced him to leave it. I couldn't even imagine how a fifteen-year-old boy could survive the living conditions in Auschwitz. There were fences surrounding groups of barracks, the fences were charged with electric power, and SS with dogs and sticks would scream at them, "Herraus, herraus, schnell; out with you quickly!" This was Birkenau! Ernst couldn't help but notice the fire and smoke in the distance. At night, they heard screams and saw the flames coming from the gas chambers and crematoria. At the beginning of July, there was a selection. Mengele came into the camp, and on the 8th or 9th of July, he gave an order to bring all young boys for selection. Ernst and Walter were put on one side, but his brother Leo was put on the other. Walter wanted to return to his parents but for some reason Ernie felt that if they were together, they would survive, so he grabbed him and convinced him to stay.

Ernst and Walter were put in Lager D, the Mannerlager, or "camp for men". The Mannerlager was next to Camp C, a camp for Hungarian women. Ernst told me that he will never forget Agnes Ganzfreid, a woman who gave Ernst a piece of bread during those times when a piece of bread was like a million dollars. Three days after Ernst came to D camp, all those who were left in the B camp were thrown on trucks and taken into the crematorium. This included his father, mother, and brother! This was the hardest part for Ernie. As he told me this, he broke down in tears and said he couldn't understand why the Germans killed all those who were in the family camp. What was even more sickening was that they had been forced to send letters back to the ghetto to show that everything was okay, and as soon as they did that, the Germans gassed them. For the next year, things didn't get any easier. Prisoners had to pull

wagons like horses, the Germans took babies and threw them into the air in order to shoot them, and babies were even torn apart. Prisoners were hungry, terrified, and hopeless. Ernst said that all they could think about was food. He ate raspberries and became sick with stomach typhus. Ernie even began hallucinating from starvation. It was absolutely horrible. Everything was now done openly because the Jews were completely under their control.

One of Ernst's worst experiences during the Holocaust took place during the evacuation of Birkenau, also known as the "Death March." In December, the Russian army was approaching, so they were sent out of the camp and forced to walk towards Gleiwitz. Sixty thousand Jews marched out of Birkenau under horrible conditions. They began to arrive at a field, and suddenly the SS, using machine guns, started to shoot. Ernst and Walter ran into a forest, but 10 minutes later they were captured by the SS and put through another transport. After several days of walking with wooden shoes in snow and rain, they were loaded into coal wagons with 180 to a wagon. They traveled for seven days with no food or water, only snow and urine. By the time they arrived in Buchenwald in January of 1945, 80 percent were frozen. They were then crowded into a barrack with seven to a bed, and here too the conditions were so horrible that some prisoners killed newcomers for their soup tokens.

Ernst was in Buchenwald from January until April 4, 1945. Suddenly one day, the camp was being evacuated, and Jews were being taken and shot. Tony, a Czech communist who was good to them, told Ernie and the rest to hide in the sewer lines. The Germans left, and for days, until the Americans came, they ate dog biscuits hard as stone. On April 11, 1945, Ernst and Walter were liberated.

Ernst lives today in California with his wife Bilha. He has children and grandchildren, but he relives these Holocaust tragedies every night. One of the last things that Ernst told me was that he will never be at peace with the war. Even today, he doesn't understand how the world could allow such a calamity to occur. He expressed that thought by telling me that on March 1944, he saw many planes, and the Jews pleaded to them to drop bombs on the crematorium, but no one did anything. Not a day passes by without him thinking about his beautiful parents and relatives that were murdered in this genocide. Ernst might have been liberated from Buchenwald on April 11, 1945, but his pain and suffering is endless. He doesn't explain why the Holocaust happened because he himself can't make any sense of it. All he can do is share his experiences with the world and help us, present and future generations, prevent such a thing from happening again.

It was an honor for me to hear this story from such an amazing and inspirational man. I hope that when people read this account, they will understand that this wasn't so long ago, and that if we do not develop tolerance for each other in this culturally diverse world, such a thing can happen again. In order to have a bright, peaceful future, we must remember the mistakes of the past and learn from them. The most important thing we can do today is remember, because through remembrance will come prevention. I will never forget Ernst's story or his final words to me: "Never forget what the world did to us."

Assemblymember Steven C. Bradford

District 51

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Michael Zelon *Interviewed by Quesia Alcaraz*

Michael Zelon

By Quesia Alcaraz

They Will Lose, We Will Survive

Winston Churchill once said, “Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it”. The most direct form of history is personal history. Michel Zelon confronted inhumane atrocities in his life through his experience and survival of the Holocaust. For many years, his experience remained hidden behind locked lips; Mr. Zelon suppressed his horrific past subconsciously. However, when the barbaric acts of the Holocaust were brought to light, he decided that he must share his story.

Michael Zelon was born and raised in Plozk, Poland. He was born to a traditional Jewish family of five on April 16, 1922. In his youth he was actively involved in school. Education was emphasized during his upbringing. Mr. Zelon, like many children at the time, played soccer, hockey, and was on the swimming team. He was well accepted and considered his education a priority.

However, dark winds began to transform his life and led him to experience one of the greatest failures of western civilization: the Holocaust. In 1937, Hitler’s teachings and campaigns of anti-Semitism throughout Europe led to the persecution of Jews and other groups who were considered “unfit” to the Aryan culture. One night, Mr. Zelon’s life was drastically changed. He and his family lost their home, their belongings, and their freedom. A group of SS officers handed his father a document which made it clear that his belongings, from that day forward, were owned by the German government. That night, ten young Jews were killed and 9,000 Jews were forced to leave the life they knew. Even more were forced into Jewish ghettos. While living in ghettos, Jews were under the strict SS rule. They were forced to wear the Star of David on their sleeves, or a yellow spot above their heart. These symbols were considered the “spot of shame” for the Jews. The Jewish people were made to work long hours under horrid weather conditions and received constant beatings from the SS.

Mr. Zelon expressed that he never found a German who showed sympathy toward Jews during this time of his life. “They were brainwashed and if they had a heart, they failed to demonstrate it. Their ideas and beliefs were incomprehensible,” said Mr. Zelon.

He recalled that on one occasion he received a severe beating from a SS officer, much bigger in size than himself. Mr. Zelon decided that if anyone were to beat him again, he would fight back. His father, Meir Zelon, warned him, “Germans have no conscious, they will shoot you. It would be better to be alive than to fight back and die.” Because he listened to his father, he is here today to tell people his experience.

From mid February through the first of March of 1941, groups of SS officers beat and rushed every Jew out of the ghettos. With no exception or pity toward the old, the sick, children, or women, all Jews were forced to leave their homes once again. This time they were headed to horse stables. The Jews were either killed or forced to sleep on straw or cement floors. For

eleven days, thousands of Jews lived in these conditions. However, unity within families produced a sense of relief and hope. On the eleventh day, these groups of Jewish prisoners were taken to the primitive, poor Polish city of Radomsk. After living in that city for a few months, the majority of people died due to hunger and weather conditions.

On May of 1941 Mr. Zelon and his brother William were taken to SkarŜysko-Kamienna, Poland, to a forced labor camp.

Mr. Zelon recalls the first two weeks of living in SkarŜysko-Kamienna as being unbelievably horrible. They were forced to build rail road tracks and were supervised by a cold hearted, strict SS officer. After fourteen days, he was moved to a different division. Mr. Zelon then worked as a mechanic in an ammunitions factory. Although he no longer received beatings, he was still a prisoner living behind wires.

Mr. Zelon was one of 1500 Jews who were divided into three divisions: aircraft, machine gun bullet production, and other manual work. Zelon was assigned to work in the bullet production division. Mr. Zelon worked twelve hour shifts, seven days a week and alternated between daytime shifts and night shifts. As people grew old or sick, they were machine-gunned in the woods. Mr. Zelon, and the other workers at this site, were supervised by Officer Harry. If something went wrong with the line of production, the machines broke, or an error was committed, the workers were taken to the upstairs "music room."

In this "music room" men were forced to pull down their pants and take a beating. This room received its name because screams, pleads, and cries were heard all the way down stairs on the factory floor. On one occasion, Mr. Zelon recalls, a man named Mancasz was beaten to such degree that he couldn't pull up his pants or sit due the painful bruising and swelling of his buttocks and legs. When walking down the stairs from the music room Mancasz exclaimed in Yiddish, "This beating will not help them. They will lose and we will survive them!" Mr. Zelon, too, suffered the terrors that took place in the "music room", but knew his survival depended on his optimism and hope. It would have been very easy for him to die in the camp. Mr. Zelon felt had to muster whatever hope he could just to survive.

Because the Russians were invading Germany, the SS officers began moving the Jews toward the west, some on a route to Buchenwald. They were forced to continue working long hours, were near starvation and lived in horrible conditions. As the Russians progressed through Germany, Mr. Zelon and his brother were terrified to know that there was a large probability that all that Jewish prisoners would be killed. Consequently, on August of 1944, they knew they had to take action. While the rest of the Jews were forced onto cattle cars and were on their way to Buchenwald and other destinations, the Zelon brothers hid in the German administration building of the camp. After everyone had gone, they managed to escape and headed east in the direction of the Russians.

They walked along some railroad tracks where they were found by mounted Russian Solders. Mr. Zelon and his brother were accused of being German Spies and were escorted back to a Russian base. After conversing in Yiddish with the main officer at a camp, explaining who they were and their circumstances, they were given some money and the freedom that they had

been longing for years. It wasn't until sometime after they were free that Mr. Zelon felt he could talk about his experience. Many people around him could not at first believe the atrocities that he suffered.

When they returned home, the Mayor of Plozk greeted them with a kiss-- the Mayor swore to kiss the first survivors he met--and gave them an apartment where they decided to live and begin a new life. It was only then that they found out their family had been murdered. Mr. Zelon returned to school to receive a superior education. After final examinations, he met a beautiful Jewish girl, and at the age of twenty-four he married. Mr. Zelon was told by many that there was no future for him in Poland, so he continued his education at the University of Munich in Germany. There, he received his Bachelors and Masters degrees in electrical engineering. In 1952, Mr. Zelon and his wife moved to the United States, where he worked as a chief engineer on the Apollo Space Project, the Space Shuttle, and other defense related projects. He and his wife were blessed with two beautiful daughters. He raised them to believe that everyone is equal and hatred should not be found in oneself.

Although Mr. Zelon endured six years of hunger, torture and beatings, he has no hatred in his heart. On the contrary, he believes that we should not only tolerate one another, but have genuine love for each other. Mr. Zelon believes that the only way to bring an end to the genocides happening around the world is to educate people. Education molds people's personalities to the point that they are more likely to decide to bring about positive changes in the world.

Michael Zelon unlocked his lips and says that he now shares his Holocaust experiences with a single purpose, to share this message: "Be tolerant in life and aim to better yourself by education and doing good deeds. Be good to people and fulfill the needs of others around the world. Never, never, never, let there be an inhumane tragedy again. I consider the Holocaust a spot of shame of the Western Civilization. It should be a lesson for every individual around the world." The Holocaust, as viewed through Michael Zelon's personal experience, teaches us a tragic lesson of history and we must ensure that we do not repeat it.

Assemblymember Julia Brownley

District 41

Is honored to present the story of
Holocaust survivor

Lou Schotland *Interviewed by Devyn Gortner*

Lou Schotland

By Devyn Gortner

That was on a Saturday Afternoon

Lou Schotland made neither judgments nor recriminations, yet he understood well the concepts of human frailty, human fear, and human delight. The people of his story reflect humanity in a word, a gesture, or lack thereof. More importantly they, along with Schotland, reflect the making of a higher aesthetic; a vision that has achieved a unique stature in the ideals of society. From a people who have undergone so much suffering at the hands of individuals with corrupted ideals, can emerge the epitome of forgiveness, hope and understanding that lends to a perspective of humanity to be seen through a new light with fresh eyes and heightened understanding. While some may argue that this story is like those other tragedies of World War II, I believe it is unique in that it is the perfect illustration of Schotland's attitude toward his experiences. Very few can remember or relate to the events that he has endured, and the conception of his astute memory proves the importance of the people and dates involved in his life. Only two types of people can be born out of the ashes of such a war: those who are resentful, hateful, and unforgiving; and those who represent compassion, graciousness, and forgiveness. Lou Schotland is an inspirational man in that he holds neither recriminations nor accusations, and thus, he can embrace his past, but also be commended and admired for what he endured.

Schotland was born on January 9, 1922 in Zwolen, Poland where he lived with his mother, father, two sisters, and two brothers before his family moved to Radom, Poland in 1935. As a boy, Schotland attended the community's Jewish public school. His father was a merchant, and his grandparents owned a leather making factory. The community in which he lived was small, and being Jewish didn't seriously affect his life before the Nazi invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. In fact, it wasn't until the news of Hitler's escalating power reached Poland around 1934 that tensions began to increase and things began to change. As Schotland recalls, "There was anti-Semitism, but it wasn't bad…legally we were treated like the 'Poles'—no different". Nonetheless, in the first weeks of September of 1939, Schotland's family was among those who were forced to bear the yellow Star of David. Eventually, the atmosphere became so unfavorable that he and his elder brother ran away to a small farm called Szedlick that was owned by their uncle. The area in which the farm was located had been taken over by the Russians, and at the time experienced heavy bombing. Unfortunately, the conditions there were almost worse than back in Radom. The soldiers patrolling the area would take the people, even the women and children, and beat them. Thus, Schotland and his brother decided to return to Radom, where they were reunited with their family. As Schotland remembers, "it was chaos". The Jewish families were put into a ghetto and anyone who questioned authority or stepped out of line was beaten severely. Their lives were carried out under the constant watch of guards. The belongings they had were few, and the soldiers would raid the homes and ship back goods and valuables that had been abandoned back to Germany.

On June 15, 1942 Lou Schotland married his current wife, Dorothy, in the ghetto of Radom. The reason for this was that soon after the Nazis came in the night with police dogs and

flashlights, ordering an evacuation from the ghetto. They separated people into different groups to be relocated. At the time, Schotland remained with his wife, although she urgently wanted to visit her sister who hadn't returned from a visit to see their mother. Schotland, however was not willing to let her go. He told her "Stay with me, because if you go over there, you cannot help her anymore, and there's a chance that you will…" (He never finished his thought). He and his wife were among the few who weren't evacuated onto the train that came to take the Jews away. "Where the train went, where it took them, I couldn't tell you. To other places of course, but I don't know. What they did was load them on boxcars and…we never heard from them again". A couple months later, Dorothy got sick, and Schotland got concerned.

"*That was a Saturday afternoon*…and I went out to see a doctor in the flea market, and he stopped me, a Jewish policeman." When Schotland tried to explain he was getting medicine for his wife, the policeman only replied "I am sorry, but I cannot let you go. If I let you go, they are going to kill me." The policeman took Schotland and another young man to the Gestapo headquarters and got them drunk; the officers taunting them purely for entertainment. The officers accused the Jews of wanting to overthrow the government, which Schotland didn't understand and only replied, "We aren't going to overthrow the government, we just want to survive."

As Schotland remembers, he and the other man were held in separate basements for eighteen days until they were finally brought back into the headquarters and forced to sign documents. "Of course we signed, we were afraid." The two men spent the night in the city jail and the next morning, were loaded onto a train. In about three and a half days, the men arrived in Auschwitz. "After we arrived, they took all of our clothing off—well, whatever we had; we didn't have much—and they sheared our heads and our private parts before they gave us a number." Schotland's number is 77019—he pulled up the sleeve of his shirt to show me. I was surprised by how easily he displayed the number, and how comfortable he was with its significance. "I asked they guy who did it, 'How come you only have 19,000 people if I have such a high number? Where are all the rest of them?' And he said, 'If you're lucky, when you go to take a shower, when you come back you'll have the answer'". Schotland was among the lucky few who were spared due to his youthful strength.

He worked in the camp until May of 1943, and as he remembers, the conditions were awful: there was a common bath where people could wash themselves, and they only received one meal a day which was given after work. In the morning the prisoners were only given black coffee. "They woke us up every morning, like four or five o'clock in the morning, and took the count to see if anybody was missing." If people happened to be missing and never turned up, they would take and shoot the same number of people who had escaped. "They did this for us to see, so nobody would run away". After his time in Auschwitz, Schotland was sent to Jaworzno where he worked in the coal mines for three shifts a day until January of 1945. Instead of using gas chambers at Jaworzno, if there were prisoners to be killed, they were taken into the woods on wagons and "dealt with"—killed and buried them right in the woods.

January 18, 1945 was the day that the prisoners of Jaworzno were evacuated to a German camp called Béchamel due to the pressing Russian and American forces. The two day long trek started out with a total of 3,500 people and ended up with only 1,800. Many people froze to

death and those who died were picked up and thrown on wagons. If someone were still alive, but fell behind, they were left in the woods to die. Schotland remembers, "I fell asleep and somebody picked me up and told me 'Get up, you have to get up or they are going to kill you' and I don't know who it was, but they helped me to survive." When they arrived at the camp, the survivors were given coffee and a piece of bread. Even after completing the journey, Schotland was finished running away. "I said 'I've had enough, if I'm going to die, it's going to be right here." Chaos at the camp began to ensue, due to the ever-present pressure from the looming ally forces. Schotland decided it was time to take action.

"We knew it was chaos. So what me and some other men did was hid under the beds. The search came in and called us out but we kept quiet. Some they found and took out, and some survived. The same day, some of the men hiding tried to get out and were killed by the guards. We decided to stay until the next day, and when we stuck our heads out, no one was there so we ran out of the camp and were liberated by the Russians in the forest. It was January 23rd or 24th. We met some French men, we found a dead horse, and ate of meal of French fries and horse meat.

"I went back to Poland by train, and the Russian army didn't believe we were survivors of the war, but we showed them our numbers and they believed." Thus, Schotland returned to Radom, where he found not a single member of his family still around. He traveled to the Czech Republic where he found a soup kitchen of sorts. He and others were picked up by the Americans and taken into Austria where they were then handed over to the English as "displaced people". They were then sent to Italy where Schotland waited until he heard word that his wife and sister were alive in Germany. Even though transportation was unorganized and dangerous, Shcotland was reunited with his sister and wife in Stuttgart, Germany. The three of them were the only ones to survive the war, as his parents, grandparents, and other siblings were never found. While Schotland's older brother had survived the war, he was very ill by the end and was immobile. Schotland was forced to leave him, on his death bed and in the care of a nun in Italy.

Schotland, his sister and wife arrived in the United States on May 31, 1946. They went to stay with relatives in New Jersey. Schotland recalls that he hasn't been on a boat since. He ate so much the first night on account of the fact that he could now celebrate substantial meals that he got sick. They were picked up in New York and then traveled to New Jersey where they stayed for a week before they moved in with Dorothy's relatives in Youngstown, Ohio. They stayed in Ohio until 1990 and eventually moved to their current residence in Agoura Hills, California in 2008.

"I should not call them prisoners, because that's not what they were. They were all, every single one of them, innocent people."

-Lou Schotland

Assemblymember Joan Buchanan

District 15

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Ezra Klug *Interviewed by Claire Viall*

Ezra Klug

By Claire Viall

In light of the most recent attacks directed at Jewish students at the University of California, Davis campus, the story of survival and courage of Ezra Klug is that much more pressing to record. I met Ezra at the Reutlinger Community for Jewish Living in Danville, California, where he currently resides. He was sitting in the dining room waiting between meals, chatting with another survivor, Gloria Reid. Before we started the interview, Ezra made it clear that he would tell me the truth, with no "hocus pocus" as he put it – what follows is his story.

Ezra grew up in Danzig, Germany, which is now Gdansk, Poland. He lived in a nice Jewish community, which he described as diverse. In his community there were Orthodox Jews, Conservative Jews and Reform Jews; however, he made sure to note that the reform Jews in Danzig would be considered Orthodox in the United States today. His community stuck together and, starting in 1937, every month, one to two hundred people were smuggled out of the community to France, Palestine and various other places in Europe. His older brothers and sisters were smuggled out of his community to South America, Sweden, and two of his siblings went to Palestine. However, because he, his brother and his sister, who were left in Danzig, were so young, it became too late to smuggle them out after the war had started.

His parents made their money from business, specifically importing and exporting goods across Europe. Ezra said that while Anti-Semitism always existed, it became explicit in Danzig starting in 1938. While Danzig was supposed to be a free state, established at the end of World War I, by the Treaty of Versailles, Nazis and the SS were present within the city. Jewish stores and businesses were vandalized and Jewish homes and synagogues attacked. In 1939, Ezra's family packed up and moved to Poland. He said this was like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire.

There was no love lost between Ezra and the Poles, and especially, the Catholic Church. Anti-Semitism was widespread in Poland and Gloria pointed out that only the Poles would allow such a camp like Auschwitz in their country. Anti-Semitism was taught in the home and was as natural as "mother's milk." Ezra said that the Catholic Church knew what the Poles were doing, sending Jews to the gas chambers, but they stood by and did nothing.

In 1941, Ezra's brother went into hiding, but he was caught and killed. If you tried to run away, most of the time you were caught by the Poles and turned over to the Germans. Ezra was all by himself. He was taken to Buchenwald in Eastern Germany, which he called the end of his life - at least as he knew it at the time. He was fourteen years old when he was taken to the camp, but telling the Nazi soldiers was a death sentence, so he hid his true age. In the camp, he performed essentially slave labor in the iron house, extracting iron from large rocks day and night. There were about 500 people in the barracks where he slept with everyone on top of each other in bunk beds that were four bunks to a row. You took what you got. Food was scarce as well. You took what you could steal - a slice of bread and some soup, but the food in the camp was impossible to come by and kept him malnourished.

On April 10th, 1945 at 10 in the morning, a date Ezra will never forget, General Patton's 6th Army Division liberated him. Tears welled up in his eyes and he paused for several moments before he started to speak about his liberation. Those in the camp did not believe that the soldiers were Americans. Ezra said it was like a circus - nobody knew for sure what was happening. They all thought they were simply German soldiers in American uniforms – it had happened before. However, there was a chaplain with the 6th Division that said in Yiddish, "Don't be afraid, you are free." To this day, Ezra thanks God for that chaplain with the American troops.

The Americans did not want to leave the Buchenwald survivors in East Germany, since it was already decided that the Russians would be taking charge of that part of Germany as decided at the Yalta Conference. The American soldiers came back with trucks and took the survivors to Western Germany. This was the turning point in Ezra's life; nothing would ever again be as difficult as the persecution he faced as a Jewish boy in Nazi Germany and Nazi-occupied Poland. Ezra said that life was now easy for him. He stated empathically that he had his freedom back - no money in the world could buy that.

Ezra spent the next six years of his life in Paris. He went to school, learned French and traveled across Europe. His brother, who had escaped to South America, was now in California and sending him money to help him stay afloat while he waited for immigration papers to come to the United States. Ezra joined an organization for concentration camp inmates and he noted that he never felt any feelings of anti-Semitism while in France. The French people, especially in Paris, were welcoming to him and very kind, particularly to the Jewish children who had survived the concentration camps. However, nothing compared to coming to the United States.

In 1951, Ezra received notification to come to the US Embassy and there he was told that he could immigrate to the United States. They called it the Golden Land. Ezra was very happy living in Paris, but there was something about the United States, something that was better. It was freer and offered more opportunity than anywhere else in the world. He jumped at the chance to come to the United States. Ezra moved to Fairfax, California where his brother who had been helping him lived. Thankful for the help his brother was able to give him to this day, Ezra was able to go to school in California and learn English. He became a citizen after five years. He entered the furniture business, did well for himself, got married and had five children.

I asked Ezra if he ever went back to Germany or Poland and he said, "No, never." Everything he wanted in life he found here, so he never wanted to leave. His story of courage ends on a message of freedom. He told me that, "Frankly speaking, there is no country like this God given country- you come here, go to school, get educated and have a good life." When he came to the United States, he had the freedom to receive an education, enter into business, and become a citizen. He feels that the people of his generation, those who came after WWII, never ended up in jail, they all became good upstanding citizens and were the "most happiest guys you can think of." Ezra does not take the freedoms he has here in the United States for granted. He paid for them dearly. He is the youngest of his family to have survived, but when I met him, I met a man who was truly happy to be living in the United States because when he came here, the door was open for him to succeed and he did.

Assemblymember Wesley Chesbro

District 1

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Leon Berliner *Interviewed by Kai Neander*

Leon Berliner

By Kai Neander

A Young Boy Survives

Leon Berliner was born February 1, 1935 in Antwerp, Belgium. His mother, Golda Chariton, was an English teacher. His father, in Leon's own words, was a "gambler and loser" who was divorced from Golda before Leon was born. For most of the first five years of his life Leon lived with his sister, Elvire, at a home in Flanders, Belgium.

Around 1940 "the winds of war started to put fear in the hearts to every Jew," Leon recalls. At the age of five Leon returned to his grandfather's house where he and his family resided until the Nazis stormed Belgium. In early May 1940 Germany began its invasion of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. Antwerp was bombed in those first few days. Leon, his family, and thousands of other civilians from Antwerp and the surrounding cities were forced to flee in order to escape Nazi persecution.

Leon, with Golda and Elvire, took a train from the outskirts of Antwerp to France; two days of travel in cramped, hot cattle cars. During the trip Golda was injured by a large rusty nail, contracting blood poisoning that needed medical attention. Golda, Leon, and Elvire detrained in the French coast city of Dieppe, where they received medical attention at a hospital near the station. A few days later, hospital administration learned Leon and his family was Jewish and tossed them out on the street.

As they returned to the train station, the Luftwaffe, Germany's air force, began bombing the city of Dieppe. After the raid, Leon said he looked out over the city and saw the hospital he and his family had just been evicted from engulfed in smoke and flames. "It is ironic that this time it served us well to have been Jewish," Leon says.

Back on the train, Leon and his family continued their journey deeper into France, which was fighting for its survival against the Nazis. Soon they linked up with the rest of their extended family and the group moved into a farm house, where they stayed for the next few weeks. It was here that Leon managed to severely cut the last digit of his left index finger with his grandfather's axe. The finger was treated by a local doctor, but the injury caused young Leon pain and discomfort for the rest of the war.

In the late summer of 1940, after France capitulated to Germany, French government trucks rounded up the family and brought them to the first of five concentration camps that Leon would be imprisoned in. Recebedou, the first of these, was a concentration camp just south of the French city of Toulouse in Southern France. This camp was used to receive and deploy thousands of Jews, Spanish civilians fleeing the Franco regime, and other refugees to camps around France.

For the next two years, Leon, between the ages of five and seven, traveled between four other concentration camps. Most of this time was spent at the camps of Noe, also south of

Toulouse, and the camp of Rivesaltes in the French Pyrenees. “I was often cold with no recourse for warmth,” Leon recalls. “I remember little of my day-to-day existence. I was frequently separated from my mother but in close company to my sister.” Most of the camps used the prisoners as workers and created materials needed for the war. Leon said he was kept occupied “by being given a spoon with which I was to dig a hole in the dirt and then fill it again. I did not learn much from this activity.”

After some time in Rivesaltes, Leon’s mother became determined to save her children from the suffering of the camps. Rumors of the German death camps had begun to circulate. “It was clear that she was going to suffer any pain and agony to save our lives,” Leon says.

Late one night, Leon and Elvire were awakened by Golda and brought to the camp’s fence. They slipped through with the help of a one-armed camp inmate with whom his mother had been associating. Young Leon slowed the group down and soon the one-armed man abandoned them. Golda had little choice but turn herself and her children into local police, who returned them to the camp. “It’s evident that Golda had but one goal at this time,” Leon says. “She seemed to have given up on any notion that she could save herself. Her children remained her sole mission. Get them out of harm’s way.”

She soon succeeded in getting Elvire into the care of the Swiss Red Cross, but Leon was too young for them to take. But Golda found another way. A short time later in June 1942, Golda, who was separated from her son and could only speak to him for a short time in the afternoon through barbed wire, told Leon to sneak up to the camp gate at sundown. Golda had befriended a young, attractive French nurse who worked at the camp but lived outside it. At sundown that night, the nurse showed up and seduced the guard at the gate. Leon dashed out of the gate, as he had been instructed. “I ran and when my little legs seemed to give up my little heart made me run some more,” Leon says. “Finally…a pickup truck loaded with just-harvested carrots stopped next to me. Two men stepped out. They heaved me in the back of the truck and covered me with those delicious vegetables.”

That was the last time Leon saw his mother. He would learn much later in life that Golda died at Auschwitz.

The organization that picked up Leon and protected him for the next few years was “Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants” (The Foundation for the Saving of Children). For the next three years Leon would be transferred around France, always under the protection of some organization or another. For two of those years he was at the Chateau de Monteleone in the little French town of Condom. Between 26 and 36 children stayed at that facility with a staff of seven. Staff members were devout Catholics. Most of the children were of some Christian denomination. Leon and four to eight other children were Jewish, he recalls. The teachings of Catholicism influenced Leon and he ended up being baptized by a priest at the Condom cathedral during his stay at the Chateau.

During his time at the orphanage a local family began to take interest in the children there. The Lanoux family owned a haberdashery of sorts in town and were very generous to the kids, in particular the Jewish children hiding from the Nazis. The Lanoux family provided food

and invited the children to dinner once or twice a week. This family ended up providing and facilitating the safe treatment of five Jewish children from the orphanage for the last year of the war and after.

In 1944 the American Friends Committee ran out of funds to keep the Jewish children at the orphanage. The Lanoux family came to their aid when the situation became serious. One night Mr. Lanoux awakened Leon and brought him and another child, Freddy, to a bar in the middle of Condom. From there they moved around the town until both boys were placed at a farmhouse outside of town. That same night five Jewish children were moved from the orphanage to different houses around the area.

Leon and Freddy were put in the care of Mr. and Mrs. Goetz, an older couple who had connections to the French Resistance. Throughout this time the Lanoux family remained in contact with Leon and Freddy and kept them connected to the other Jewish children that had been taken from the orphanage that night. Leon and Freddy lived with the Goetz family until the end of the war in France.

After Germany's defeat, Leon was claimed by his Aunt Ida and brought back to Belgium, where he remained for four years. Eventually he had a chance to immigrate to the United States with help from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and the Aide aux Israelites Victimes de la Guerre. Belgium would not recognize Leon as a citizen, nor would Poland, where his father was born. So when Leon sailed to the United States in September 1948 aboard a rusty Liberty Ship, which had recently been renamed the S.S. Ernie Pyle, he was classified as "stateless" – a 13-year-old boy without a country.

Leon became a U.S. citizen, got an education, served in the U.S. Army and later made a life for himself in the United States. In 1971 Leon and his wife, Diana, whom he married in 1960, moved to Humboldt County, California – their home for the past 39 years. Over the years Leon has remained in contact with some of the individuals from his childhood Holocaust experience, including the Lanoux family, with whom he corresponds with regularly. He was most recently in France in 2008 to honor the work of the Lanoux family with a "Righteous among Nations" Medal from the Yad Vashem organization. Yad Vashem's mission is to memorialize the heroic acts of non-Jews who saved the lives of Jews around Europe during the Nazi occupation of Word War II.

Leon, now 75, owns and operates Berliner's Cornucopia, a music store in downtown Eureka. Leon and Diana, a teacher, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this year. I interviewed Leon at length in his shop on February 24, 2010. I also excerpted some material from an unpublished autobiography Leon allowed me to read for the purpose of writing his story.

Assemblymember Joe Coto
District 23

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivor

Emery Fabri — *Interviewed by Ashwin Sundar*

Inge Rosenthal — *Interviewed by Daisy Rincon*

Acknowledgements

Susie Martin, Teacher
Evergreen Valley High School
San Jose, CA

Emery Fabri

By Ashwin Sundar

Let's Learn from Our Mistakes and Never Ever Repeat Them

The Holocaust is one of the most devastating events of modern history. The cruel treatment of several groups, most notably those of Jewish descent, is alarming inhuman behavior. Nazi Germany had grown powerful in the 1930s, and had taken full control of Europe. Under this Nazi regime led by Adolf Hitler, bigotry and hatred of several ethnic and miscellaneous groups and cultures lead to what is known as the Holocaust. The most notable group that was punished by the Nazi Regime was the Jews, whom Hitler blamed as the "cause" for everything that was wrong with the world. Most Jews were sent to internment camps, where they were tortured and ultimately killed. There was a high death rate for those who were persecuted by the Nazis, and although some survived, their scars remained. Others were sent to specific camps, such as labor camps or relocation camps. Although the punishment they received wasn't as severe as those in the internment camps, they still had scars and bruises from their battles throughout the whole ordeal. Enter Emery Fabri, a Hungarian Jew. Emery was sent to a labor camp during the Holocaust, where he did various types of labor. He currently resides in San Jose, CA. It's a long way from what he had been through back in the 20th century. His story is a unique one, and he carries the memories wherever he goes.

Emery Fabri was born in Hungary, a country in Eastern Europe, in 1922. At that time, Europe was recovering from World War I, where the Treaty of Versailles caused a major economic and political downturn for Germany. Emery was born in a largely agricultural town. Several villages surrounded Emery's town, and they were all agriculture-based as well. Emery's birthplace was known for cultivation of potatoes, one of the most popular products in Hungary. As a child, and into his teens, Emery was the typical boy. He liked to play on the streets with his friends, and took part in popular sports like soccer (football in Europe) and water polo. His family was very tight-knit, he had 1 brother, and several aunts and uncles on either side of the family. In fact, they were so close that a majority of the family lived in a 25-mile radius of each other. His parents owned a merchandise business, so they were considered middle-class: not rich but they had means to provide for themselves.

As for Jewish heritage, Emery said there were two types of synagogues in his town: conservative and orthodox. Orthodox Judaism was the strictest form of the religion, as it followed very closely the religious laws. They were very observant on what foods to take at certain times and what to do on Sabbath. Emery's family, as he described it, followed Conservative Judaism which was more open-minded in following the religious laws. Emery learned Jewish history, ideology, and literature in his studies.

Emery attended a regulated high school, which was fairly common in Hungary. The schools were similar to the way modern American public schools currently run. Since the school that Emery went to was mainly mixed and comprised of several different cultures, Anti-Semitism wasn't as prominent as those in other schools. In fact, Emery had been acquainted with several

non-Jews, so as a result he wasn't impacted. Unfortunately, that sentiment lasted only a short while. In 1939 new laws, similar to the Nuremburg Laws, came into effect. The Nuremburg Laws discriminated against Jews which forced them to quit their jobs and made it so they were not allowed to attain certain statuses or seek certain professions. For example, the Jewish professionals who use to be a big part of the teaching population in Hungary were no longer allowed to teach. The restrictions also affected the arts and more importantly, the businesses. How did this affect Emery? Well just as he was graduate high school he found that any hopes he had of going to college faded away. It turned out that the restrictions made him ineligible for college because of his religious orientation, and could not attend. After graduation from high school, Emery decided to learn a trade. He went to work in a factory plant and became a certified mechanic. According to Emery, the general consensus in his town was that the measures to which the regime would take, were overextended. So they didn't worry as much as they should have. They believed that it wouldn't impact them, and who could blame them? But it did, and the next decade or so would prove to be the most pivotal of Emery Fabri's life.

In 1942, Emery was sent to a forced labor camp, which was administered by the Hungarian Army. Depending on where they were relocated, the Jews were forced to do heavy and hazardous physical work in mines, such as coal mines. Emery's group worked in the forest of the Carpathian Mountain, digging deep wells so that the Army could blow up the existing mountain roads to slow down the advancing Russian Army. They also cut the trees and built new roads and military defenses in the forest. All the work was done by hand which made it a more laborious task than it should have been. An interesting story to note is about one day when he going to work at a railroad station, it was freezing at the time when Emery came across a village. He met a man that was selling goat-hair socks. Luckily Emery bought a pair because that purchase proved to be what saved his feet. If it had not been for the socks keeping him warm throughout the snow and rain, certainly his feet would have been damaged due to frostbite.

The Holocaust was notable for the Nazi treatment of Jews. At times, the Hungarian Army would be in charge, and at times the German Army would be. The Hungarian Army was much more relaxed, which wasn't so true for the Germans. Although the Hungarian Army wasn't as cruel as the Germans, Emery's group was still heavily mistreated. The guards were actually crueler than the officers. As far as food was concerned, Emery and his group mostly ate bread and dried beans. They did not starve, but were given very little food.

As the Russian Army advanced in 1944, the Hungarian government tried to build contacts with the Western government. In March the Germans fully occupied Hungary by establishing a Nazi government. The Germans sent Colonel Adolf Eichmann and their "sonderkommando" units to exterminate the Jews of Hungary. They forced the Jews in ghettos and transported them in railroad cars to Auschwitz, where more than 500 thousand Hungarian Jews were murdered. Most of Emery's family died there. Many Jews were saved in Budapest by a rescue effort by a Swedish diplomat, Ralph Wallenberg. In December 1944, Emery's group was force-marched to a railroad-station to transport them to work in Germany. Along the way Emery stepped off the road while his group was walking on and escaped to a nearby barn. He didn't come out for two days, and the owner of the barn told him to stay out of sight. When the Russian Army occupied the area (which is modern day Ukraine) he decided to leave the barn, but had to walk through the Russian troops. He left the barn carrying only a water bucket, and

learned one phrase in Russian, “My mother is sick and I need the water.” Emery was lucky; he was able to walk through the Russian troops, and all the way back to his hometown.

In 1945, Emery moved to Budapest, where his aunt had previously lived; she had died in the Holocaust. The house was now occupied with several people, but he got himself a room in the house. He decided to study at the technical university in Budapest, now that he had the freedom to do so. It wasn’t easy though, the semester had already started. In addition, the university building was severely damaged due to the war. Emery had to be able to fully understand the material even though he had missed several study years. Luckily, his high level of high-school math exams qualified him for this university. He eventually graduated with a degree in electrical engineering. He used his degree to find work in Budapest and stayed there for about seven years.

In 1956, a new form of violence began to take place: The Hungarian Revolution. The basic premise of this revolution was that the citizens of Hungary didn’t want the Russian Army to occupy their land; their presence caused discontent. The Hungarians wanted rights, and facing an armed revolution the Russians withdrew. However, not too many days later they regrouped and reoccupied Hungary. Emery decided to leave Hungary and he was able to escape to Austria, walking through a mountain on a rainy night. In 1957, Emery received permission to emigrate to the United States of America.

In the U.S., Emery adjusted well, but he did not have a lot of money. He had $100 for an emergency, but never spent it. In fact, he still has that money to this very day. Probably the biggest challenge in adjusting to American life was learning to speak English. However, once he learned, it was no longer hard to find work because work found him. He moved to New York, where he got a job in a small company for seven years, then moved to San Francisco to work in a larger company. After retirement, he moved to San Jose, CA, where he lives in a beautiful and peaceful community home.

Emery Fabri’s story is like many other Jews who had to go through this dark period. It was a time that many wish to forget. The daring escapes and the fighting along the way were all a part of this historic era. Talking to him, he said that the reason he led a good life afterwards was that he was fortunate and had a solid base to build on. He closed his story with one final statement, “Looking back, it is important to learn history. Know what happened because you do not want to repeat it. Don’t repeat history.”

Inge Rosenthal

By Daisy Rincon

Determined To Live

Background

Inge was born on October 26, 1927 in a small town of Germany. Her family was one of the two Jewish families in the town. Anti-Semitism was beginning to take place but as an only child, she was isolated from most of it during her young life. But by the time she entered the third grade, it began to impact her, all of the Jewish children were excluded from the school system in Germany. She became lonely and would not have received an education if her parents had not hired a private tutor. Although she was not personally affected by the Jewish discrimination until the third grade, she knew that the discrimination and differences existed since before she was born.

The Start

In 1939 Inge's family moved to Berlin for about six days because the Nazis had taken over their home and shop. Upon their return to their home Inge's father was sent to a concentration camp. Her father was two-hundred pounds on November 9th, 1939 when he was sent to the camp and at the end of January of 1940 when he returned he weighed only ninety pounds. In the meantime Inge, her Mother, and her Grandmother were bypassed by the Nazis as they continued removing the Jewish population from their homes. Everything the Jews owned had been burned – the synagogues, homes, and business. Luckily Inge's family had been overlooked.

A Journey to China

The family was told about an escape route to Shanghai, in which they would live under the Japanese rule in a ghetto. The only form of transportation was by ship, an Italian ship. A man offered the family transportation tickets for double the price per seat. Her parents found the price to be costly, but they knew they had to leave and so Inge's grandmother who had money saved under a mattress helped with the cost. Her family bought the tickets with four German currency coins and clothing. Inge, her grandmother, father, and mother then boarded the Italian ship, headed to Shanghai, China, at the Bon Deazi Port and traveled for twenty-one straight days.
Although the family was Jewish, once aboard the ship they were treated like people. The Italians treated them better than they had ever been treated. Inge and her family had food and enjoyed the commodities on the beautiful ship. While onboard they weren't discriminated against nor disadvantaged; they were people.

Shanghai, China

Upon arrival to Shanghai, China, Inge and her family were driven to the refugee camp in an old beat up truck by Chinese drivers. The camp had been organized by an American-Jewish

Organization. “We got lucky”, claimed Inge because her and her family were given a house to live in instead of a camp. Her grandmother, according to the Japanese, was too fragile to live in a camp. The family was given one of the few houses that had not been burned down by the Chinese. They shared the house with another family. The house was small, but it was enough. It had a bed, a dresser, and they had food. Although they didn’t starve, the family did not receive much food. In order to obtain food, Inge’s mother woke up in the early mornings and walked to a camp to pick up a small portion of food.

Life in Shanghai was possible because everyone helped each other. 4,000 out of the 20,000 Jews that lived in the town passed away of either starvation or diseases since there weren’t any hospitals. Inge’s younger cousin caught malaria and like many others died due to the absence of medicine.

At Work

Inge had, and to this date has, a passion to help children. While in Shanghai she worked in a nursery as an aide. The children were of many different nationalities and she taught them English. Every day on her way to work she would pass by the Japanese that had already turned against Jews because of the war with the United States, and she would have to show her passport. A few times she witnessed the beating of Jews, but she continued through the same route because “[she loved] children and no one [was] going to stop [her]”. The children came into the nursery not knowing a single word in English, but two months later they had learned “English with a German accent”. After working all day, Inge would attend school. She managed to complete junior college in English and was taught by Chinese teachers. “It was fun”, claimed Inge referring to work and school.

1943 – The Start of the War

In 1941 the Americans entered the war and everything began to change. In 1943 when the war truly started, Americans dropped the bombs that saved her life. She was walking with the children from the nursery when bombs were released. Inge held the children not realizing the danger, but fortunately no one was injured. The bombs were dropped into the ghettos, but even then the Jews were appreciative towards the Americans. Fifty percent of the Jews were happy that the Americans had entered the war and the other fifty were afraid not of the Americans, but of the bombs that might hit the ghetto while they tried to eradicate the Nazis. By the end of the war, bombs were dropping everyday from 11:50 am to 2:00 pm. Even though Inge was told not leave the house between those hours she did so anyway. She was a young sixteen year old and she would go on walks during those hours because her curiosity led her. As she walked around police would tell her to go back inside. However, her logic told her that if she remained inside the house and a bomb dropped on or around it she would disappear. Therefore, she believed that if she walked around she could run away when they were dropped. Whenever, she left the house for her daily walks her grandmother would go into her room and pray “protect the kid” because she would have suffered if her Inge passed away. Inge, however, assured her family that no one was going to hurt her and so she continued to defile her mother’s orders.

When the War Ended

When Inge heard of the passing of Hitler a mix of emotions raced through her body. The bombs in Japan had saved her life. She woke up the next morning and the Japanese had disappeared. The disappearance of many Jews made it nearly impossible to find relatives. Besides not being sure to know where they were or if they were even alive. Inge found out that one of her relatives had passed away through a documentary, many years later. Her family stayed in Shanghai, China until they received a visa from the United States. Her grandmother, however, was not able to receive an American visa and so they didn't migrate. Inge came to the United States by herself after the United States allocated her three opportunities to migrate. Her mother was left behind with her grandmother until she was able to receive a Polish visa and she migrated to Canada because she did not speak English. Inge's grandmother lived in Canada for two years and then entered the United States. In the United States, at the age of eighty-four, her grandmother told Inge's mother to pay for a tutor because she wanted to learn English.

As soon as Inge arrived in the United States she was taken to a hospital for six weeks in which she would be monitored for possible diseases that she might've been carrying from China. The Jewish-American community paid for everything – her medical and living expenses. After six weeks Inge moved to Oakland with her uncle because she was under twenty-one years of age. Inge began to work with children in a nursery and earned twenty dollars a week. After working there she began to work taking care of soldiers. She met her husband, a World War II veteran, in Berkeley on New Years Eve and moved to New York for a year. They didn't live in New York for too long because she felt as if she were back in Shanghai all over again; the conditions weren't sanitary and she was poor. After returning to California, Inge opened her own nursery in Campbell which she owned for eighteen years. The nursery was open to children of all nationalities. Today, her love for children and their development remains.

Reflections on Life

Inge was a happy teenager in Shanghai. She had friends and there was entertainment and an education was possible. The ghetto had a museum, a theater, and an opera. After many years she visited her homes in Shanghai and Germany, however she couldn't stand looking at the past and so she left. Life in Germany was lonely, but as the war progressed her life improved. "Life today [with the recession] isn't difficult. As long as you have your family and food, life is good". Losing materialistic possessions is not the end of life. Her thoughts on life are: "It isn't easy, but it's not as difficult as we make it to be today. You need determination to live and luck will come with it."

Assemblymember Mike Feuer
District 42

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Miriam Bell	*Interviewed by Michelle Yousefzadeh*
Gitta Ginsberg	*Interviewed by Mollie Aberle*
John S. Gordon	*Interviewed by David Josephson*

Acknowledgements

Susan Alexman, Director of Senior Services
Jewish Family Service of Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA

Bridges Academy
Studio City, CA

Miriam Bell

By Michelle Yousefzadeh

Many Miracles

As Miriam Bell graciously welcomes me into her home, she quickly insists that we have something to eat before beginning the interview. She kindly puts together toasted challah bread and cheese, but waits to eat hers because of a throat problem she recently developed. Displayed everywhere around the charming Wilshire house were pictures of Bell's family, which includes her two daughters and four grandchildren. We sit down as Bell pulls out a journal she's been writing in from time to time which includes stories or anecdotes she remembers in her sleep. She starts from the beginning.

My name is Miriam Galperin Bell. I was born October 10, 1930 in Kaunas (Kovno), the main city of Lithuania in the Baltic Country. My family was middle class, and I was taken care of very well. We were very happy and had a big family. At home we spoke Yiddish, Hebrew and Lithuanian. I was one of seven children: four sisters and three brothers. My father's name was Chaim Galperin and my mother's name was Faige Alperovich Galperin. My father's business was transportation. It was passed down to him from my grandfather from the time when there were no cars. We owned beautiful carriages like the ones used by the Queen of England. This type of carriage is still being used by the royal family of England. We sold and rented those carriages, with horses, and also sleighs. My father also sold paint and kerosene for lighting lamps. In 1941, on a Friday evening, German SS Nazis occupied Lithuania. We were all sitting together- aunts, uncles, cousins, my sisters, and brothers- singing songs, kissing each other and lighting candles for evening services. All of a sudden we heard shouting, screaming, beating. People were running. We ran out of our homes. Nobody knew what to do. The Germans were shooting everyone. My father was shot and killed right next to us in cold blood. I wasn't even eleven years old. My mother tried to cover my eyes so I wouldn't see it, but I heard and saw it. I heard the Nazis shouting "This is what we'll do to all the filthy Jews." This branded me for life.

I was taken to a ghetto in Slobotka, not far from Kovno. It was built with barracks and barbed wire. If you touched the barbed wire, you could get electrocuted. I told myself "I will never let them kill me. I will not give up." I was put with my mother, my grandmothers, my nine- and six-year old sisters and my four-year old brother in a different barrack from my older, married sister who had a six month old baby girl. We did not know where my two older brothers were. Every day Jews were tortured - first the very old, then the little children. My sister's baby girl was taken away by the Nazis and shoved into a shack where the big rats ate her. Then they rounded up the older people and young children, took them to fields and shot all of them, day after day. Some were buried, still alive. Bullets took thousands and thousands of people. Each day in the ghetto, the Nazis would round up people and send them to the concentration camps.

One time in the ghetto, when I was 11, because I was blond, had blue eyes, and could pass for Lithuanian, I snuck out of the ghetto to look for food. A local girl who knew me pointed me out as Jewish to the guards. I was herded into a field with many other Jewish people and the

German guards shot everyone dead – I somehow survived under the bodies of the dead people. I had to feel my own heart beating to know if I was alive. When I crawled out from under the dead bodies, a local man who knew my family but who the Nazis had brought along as a soldier, saw me and snuck me back into the ghetto. So I survived.

My family was split up into different barracks. My mother and I hid my younger brother who was four. In the barracks, my mother would try to lie in front of him on the bunk beds to hide him, but the Nazis and the German shepherd dogs found him. They let the German shepherds kill him. Among the people they took to be shot in the big field were my grandmothers and six-year old sister. Before the next roundup, my mother told me to go with my nine-year old sister 'Dina-lah' to my older sister Ethel and to give her a framed family picture that my mother had kept. She thought Ethel would have a better chance of surviving, and so the family portrait could survive too. My mother told me not to give that picture to anyone else. On my way, all of a sudden I saw hundreds of people lined up. The Nazis were beating them and chasing them and pushing and dividing them to the right side and to the left side. They pushed my sister to the bad side and a Nazi grabbed the picture from my hand. I tried to pull it back from him and told the man that my mother had told me not to give the picture to anybody. In the struggle, by a miracle, I was pushed to the good side. This is when they put my group on a cattle train, which ended up in Estonia. On the train, there was no way to see, we could hardly breathe, there was very little food, just some water. There was no way to tell how long we were on the train – perhaps a week, because we could not tell day from night.

When we arrived in Vivara, the Estonian camp, we didn't know where we were going. We were beaten and pushed. We were given shoes and were forced into slave labor. It was winter time, with a lot of snow, which would get stuck in our wooden shoes. Inside the camp, I saw a pile of clothing on the ground: shoes, and dresses, and coats. These had belonged to the people pushed to the bad side in the ghetto. I recognized Dina's clothes because our clothes were the same and made by the same dressmaker. I knew my sister was dead. She was suffocated in the train. The Nazis gave them nothing to drink because the Nazis wanted to save their bullets, so they let them die.

We had to work very hard. If you fell and wouldn't get up, you died by freezing to death or else they would shoot you. I kept telling myself, "I'm not going to let them kill me. I have to be strong and go on!" Every day, they continued to beat us if you didn't work hard or fast enough. We carried bricks and stones and dug graves – it was the hardest labor. We were told that another group from another slave labor camp would be arriving. I wondered if maybe my brother was there. A group of skeletons walked past us. The only way to see who they were was by their eyes and if they called your name. Like a miracle, I recognized my brother. Many of them had typhoid. I saw the Nazis put him in tents with lice and dirt, not in the barracks. I didn't know what to do. The next morning, they were yelling at us to do slave labor and while they were counting us, everyone else went to work, but when it came to me, I didn't move. A Nazi, Mr. Smith, started beating me on the head. I was bleeding. I didn't move. He said "You filthy, dirty Jew. Why aren't you moving?" I told him, "If you don't let my brother into a hospital (there was a hospital with Jewish doctors where the Nazis would send people whom they wanted to stay alive for slave labor), you can kill me too." He took my brother to the hospital and I followed to make sure they really took him. Sure enough, like a miracle, the doctor

came and took my brother. As soon as my brother saw me, he called me by my name, 'Miraleh.' I recognized the doctor, Dr. Klibanov. This doctor recognized me because he had the same office, near the Lithuanian president's office, with my aunt, my mother's sister, who was a pediatrician. He told me that he would take good care of my brother and see that I didn't have to work so hard in the slave labor. The next day I fell in the snow and asked them to take me to the hospital. The doctor kept me for three weeks and I helped him. This is why I wanted to be a nurse. This also helped me get strong enough to survive, because of his help.

After being in Estonia for many, many months, the women were taken to Stutthof Concentration Camp in Poland. After that I didn't know what had happened to my two older brothers or my older sister. I was taken to one of two ships. We had to sit in the lowest part of the ship and there was only a little window next to me. I saw the other ship sink and everyone drown. Later I found out the Germans intended to sink us too, and that they caused the first ship to sink. I thought we would be next, but miraculously, we arrived at the concentration camp. When we got there, we had to undress and be checked everywhere to make sure we weren't hiding anything. They gave us the striped dresses with a star on the left sleeve and a number, and then let us go to the barracks. We had to clean, wash, dig…wherever they took us, we had the worst treatment. The cruelty was consistent. When we got back from working, we were lined up. There were thousands of people from Poland, Hungary- an unbelievable amount. We were given soap, a towel and were told that we were going to be taking showers. People went in, in, in- and we weren't seeing anybody coming out. I was only four rows from going in when they stopped. We were not going into the gas chamber. It was a miracle that I wasn't in there.

Every day, we worked. My barrack was such a close family: if one fell and got hurt we were all in pain. In the mornings, we got a slice of bread, margarine, jam, and water. We cleaned and dug. In my heart I felt that maybe my brother was in Stutthof. There were some days that we were allowed to walk around and I noticed that on the other side of the barbed wire there were barracks with only men. If you touched the wire, you'd be electrocuted or shot and killed. Every day, I'd save a piece of bread so that I could give it to my brother somehow, because I knew that he was still sick. I kept the pieces of bread under my head wrapped in a piece of cloth so no one would steal it. One evening, I saw my brother. So the next time I could walk around, I threw a little piece of bread over the electrified fence to my brother. I wasn't sure if he got it and I only found out after the war that he got it. Somehow, someone saw me, but because we all looked alike – like skeletons and wearing the same clothing – they didn't know who it was. The guards took everyone in my barracks outside and started to beat us and ask who it was. My friends knew it was me but they didn't want to tell on me. When I saw the guards take out the hoses with freezing cold water to spray my friends, I finally stood up and explained what I had done, that I had saved a little piece of bread for my brother. They put me down on a special bench especially for this. They laid me down on my stomach and gave me maybe twenty-five beatings with the black bats until I was unconscious. They left me there for the rest of the night. My friends came from the barracks and took me inside and took care of me and I survived.

As the Russians advanced, we couldn't stay anymore in Stutthof, so the Germans took us to a slave labor ammunitions factory in Hamburg. We were three hundred women- most were older than me, some were my friends from home. I was 14 years old. My job was to pick up a

basket of big grenades, sharpen them and put them back. If you made more, you got more bread. If you made less, you'd get a beating. I tried to do whatever I could but I cut my thumb right in the joint. They wouldn't give me anything for it, and today my thumb is still bent - but I survived. When only half of us were left, they took some of us to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. We were there for three months. When we got inside, we saw stacks of dead bodies- skeletons, stacked like bricks. Everyone got hysterical- screaming, pulling their hair, losing their minds. At home my father would sing the most beautiful love songs for my mother. I'll never forget the songs. I made up a song, and started to sing it. The song was called "Don't Say That This Is Your Last Journey." This is like a strong, partisan song that says, "What we pray for today will come." My friends opened their eyes and felt much better. We were put in tents with lice and mice and no latrines – you had to go to the bathroom right where you lay. We were sent there to die and we knew this was it and we'll never survive. After two days, I was called out along with my friend from home. They gave us soap and a towel. We started shaking and holding each other because we knew we were going to the gas chamber. After the shower, they gave us the special striped clothing and they took us to the kitchen to cook for the Nazis. We peeled potatoes, vegetables, and made soup. It was wonderful! We were not going to be killed. It's a miracle again.

We got to stay in the barracks- and who do we see there? Anne Frank. I remember that she was very quiet and gentle and I liked her very much. I was very worried about the others in the tents who had no food. So one evening I found a big bucket, filled it up with the soup and snuck it to my friends. Some had already died. They grabbed it with their hands, digging into the bucket. All of a sudden, two SS Nazis came in and took me out of there, back to the barracks. They didn't take me to work in the kitchen anymore. Anne Frank died from typhoid three weeks before we were liberated. I also got sick with typhoid. I don't remember how long it was before I was liberated. I knew I was dying; I could see my mother coming to me in a vision, giving me beautiful clothing and wiping down my fevered skin. Seeing my mother kept me strong.

Soldiers arrived in big tanks with speakers calling out, "Hello, hello, we are the British army. You're free! Don't run, don't scream, stay where you are!" They spoke in German and someone translated into English and Yiddish. People thought it was a trick from the Nazis. People started to run and look for food, they couldn't believe it. I was lying there, sick, dying. Then I saw someone coming towards me. He said "Miraleh!" It was my brother's best friend. He took me out of the barracks and told me we had to leave because the Nazis had set bombs to explode under the camp. The British let us see doctors and gave us medicine. I weighed maybe fifty pounds. I was a real skeleton. They opened up the room where the dead people's clothing, jewelry, and watches were stored, so we could get clothes and belts for the pants. Many people wanted to go back home. We were 5 girls and 10 boys all around 18 to 20 years old. I was 15, my friend was 17. We wanted to go back to Lithuania. We thought maybe someone had returned there, maybe we'd get back the house and go to school. We didn't know where else to go. To get to Lithuania, you had to take the train through the Ukraine. So when we stopped in Ukraine, there were a lot of Russian soldiers who saw us and they asked us who we were. So we told them that we were from Lithuania, we were Holocaust survivors and we wanted to go back. They took away the boys' watches and belts. They came to me and asked me how old I was, so I said fifteen. They didn't believe that I could have survived so they accused me of being a part of

the Nazis. They took me away from everyone, to jail. My friend Benjamin asked them, "Why are you taking her to jail? You just liberated us!" so they took him to jail too. But they didn't lock our doors. Benjamin told me that if I got scared or if anyone came in to hurt me that I should just scream to them and he would come and help me. He was afraid that someone would rape me. I sat there in the middle of the night. A Russian soldier came in to my room and kept telling me I was beautiful. And he kept touching my face. I started yelling. So Ben came in and beat him up and brought the security to stop him. They let Benjamin out but kept me in. All my friends waited outside until I was released. They refused to go back to Lithuania without me. As they waited by the train station, Ben saw my oldest brother David get off the train. David had gone to Berlin to work after the liberation, but he had been given a visa to go to Lithuania to see if anyone was there. Ben told my brother that I was alive and put in jail. The security called me out the next morning. From far away I saw David, who I didn't know was alive, on the other side of the gate. We cried. Even the Russian soldiers were crying and strangers were crying. Even the stones were crying. Another miracle.

My brother told us not to go to Lithuania, but to Germany and then to America. He said that nothing was left in Lithuania. Nothing was left in the houses, but the blood from the people who were killed there. My brother gave me some money, but it wasn't enough for everyone so only four of us could buy fake papers. We said we were Polish so we could get out of the Ukraine. We bought some food and rented a room from a family, but while we slept, the family stole our money. The four of us decided that since we were Holocaust survivors, we would jump a train to Berlin. We climbed on top of the train and hid next to the smokestacks, where the smoke went over us. In Berlin, my brother took care of me for a while, but then his boss said that everyone from Lithuania had to return there. We ran away to a kind of kibbutz to get papers to get to Munich, and in Munich we were sent to an UNRA special orphanage camp with social workers who would give us a place to live and learn a trade. I lived there for three years until I was 18 and took a nursing course. In 1948 they arranged for some to go to America and some to Canada. I was sent with 300 others to Montreal. The social worker who was taking care of us in Montreal told me that I had to go to Toronto to live with a new family and be adopted. I didn't want to leave my friends. I was eighteen years old and said I didn't want to be adopted. Instead I went to night school and worked at the hospital, but I couldn't be a nurse because I had learned everything in German. I had to re-learn everything. I met my husband Sam Bell (originally Bull) in Toronto. He was also a survivor, from Bucharest, Romania, who lost his whole family. We would meet with friends at the temple and at get-togethers. I was standing outside, and he came to me and introduced himself. I wasn't even thinking of going out. Everywhere I went, he was there. We were picked to dance together for a version of Fiddler on the Roof. I moved into a top floor of a house. My husband also moved in, so I moved out the next day! Everywhere I went, he was there, so I started dating him. We got married in 1950. We both worked very hard. My husband worked two jobs to save money for a house. I got pregnant and had my older daughter, Frances, and then my little daughter, Helen.

I don't hate the Germans, I hate the Nazis that killed the six million Jewish people and others. You cannot hate the German children because they didn't do anything. I was also a child when this happened, and I didn't do anything to anybody. If I can give any advice, it would be: be good. Be kind. Anyone that needs help, do anything you can to help. Doesn't matter what happens - tell yourself, it's going to get better. This should never happen again. Lastly,

everything we survivors contribute to humanity helps us be human again. From the ashes we rose, with modesty we contribute.

Mrs. Bell wept as she showed photographs given to her by the British army at Bergen Belsen of the bench where she was beaten and of the stacks of dead prisoners there. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she read a statement:

"I like to make people aware by being an innocent victim of the Nazis, I can tell you about the destruction of Jewish property, the deportation of thousands and thousands of Jewish people, the separation of mother and child, husband and wife, man and woman, the pain of never again being in your mother's arms or sitting on your father's knees. I will tell you what I faced. The graves we were forced to dig. Many buried alive. Gassed and burned, babies and children thrown into flames and eaten up by rats. Their lives cut short. Why? And the world looked on in silence. I can tell of those who died for being Jewish, for who they were, for what they believed. I hope this never happens again.

Holidays are the worst. When my children were little in Toronto, I would set the table for 30 people, all for my missing family. How many more years will I live? These things should never be forgotten."

Gitta Ginsberg

By Mollie Aberle

Wrong Country, Wrong Time

Gitta Ginsberg, born in 1937 in Vienna, Austria, claims she was born in the wrong country at the wrong time. Her father Sam, originally from Romania, was a tailor, and her mother Regina was a homemaker with a brilliant flare for cooking.

As the political climate in Austria grew more daunting, her parents decided to move to Belgium, which was still "free," in 1938. They moved into a typical Jewish neighborhood in Brussels, and lived quietly until the Germans invaded Belgium (as well as France and Holland) in 1940/41. Gitta recalls having to wear the identifying yellow Star of David on her clothing, and to this day, detests wearing nametags. As the situation grew worse, with Jews being arrested for no reason and vanishing, Gitta's parents grew fearful and looked for a way to assure Gitta's safety. Through family friends, Gitta's parents met Alice Spinete, a single, Catholic Belgian woman who was interested in helping to save Jewish children. Alice and Gitta met, and took to one another immediately. Gitta moved into Alice's lavish apartment, and came to know a lifestyle she had never known before. Alice's apartment had multiple rooms (instead of only two), bathrooms (instead of an outhouse), a marble foyer, decorative mirrors, an oven in the kitchen, a telephone, a maid, and so much more! Gitta was given her own room, but cried incessantly her first night there, so Alice took her into her own bed, where Gitta continued to sleep for the duration of her time with Alice.

Gitta had taken with her only a few clothes, and Alice supplied the rest. She was clad in beautiful dresses, ate a variety of plentiful food, and was showered with books and toys. Despite the excess and indulgence, Gitta was anchored to her parents by the words her father spoke to her as she was handed over to Alice. He said, "It's only make-believe," and Gitta recalls reminding herself frequently that this was not her real life. One day, she would be reunited with her parents.

During the time that Gitta lived with Alice, her parents continued to live in their Brussels apartment, and were able to visit her occasionally. Of course, going out with the Star of David sewn to their clothes put them at risk, so they did not visit often. Gitta vividly remembers one St. Nicholas Day celebration where Alice had Gitta's parents over for a delicious holiday dinner. The meal was extravagant, the entire apartment had been beautifully decorated, and the gifts seemed endless.

When Gitta was about 5 years old, Alice insisted that Gitta be baptized. Initially, Gitta's parents refused, and Alice threatened to return Gitta; eventually, Gitta's Orthodox grandmother convinced them that it was the necessary thing to do. With the baptism came papers documenting it, which Gitta suspects put Alice at ease given the rising tension with Nazis hunting for Jews. Alice renamed Gitta "Janine Spinete," enrolled her in a parochial nursery school, and removed the yellow stars from Gitta's clothing.

One weekend in 1943, while at a friend's farm in the countryside, the SS came knocking at 4:00 A.M., looking for Gitta. They had been tipped off by a woman at the farm who was dating a German soldier. Despite Alice's insistence that she was a baptized Catholic, the Nazis took her to their headquarters, and placed her in a pitch black cellar, alone, except for rats. Gitta was crying, frightened, when suddenly a man's voice spoke to her in Yiddish, which translate to, "Little girl, don't cry, little girl." Gitta remained inconsolable.

Eventually, she was let out of the cellar. Alice had told the SS officers that Gitta was her baptized godchild, and that her parents had been killed in the concentration camps. The Germans then placed Gitta in one of three Jewish orphanages (separated by age). The orphanages were all run by Jewish adults. Fortunately, Gitta's parents had found work in the orphanage for teenagers, which was an actual castle, and friends of her parents worked in the orphanage that she was in (for younger children). The Germans were pleased to have all the Jewish children and Jewish caregivers together in the orphanages, as it would be easier to rid of them when the time came. In June 1944, the Resistance had apparently received word that the orphanage residents were about to be captured by Germans, and rescued the children and adults by loading them on to trucks and transporting them to convents in Belgian villages.

Gitta's parents eventually found her at the convent she had been taken to, and they all returned to the castle, as did most of the other Jewish orphaned teenagers. There, Jewish agencies assisted in placing the remaining children. Many went to Palestine or the U.S., others went to the orphanage in Antwerp. Gitta and her parents returned to Brussels and rented a home with family friends. Since they were Jewish and therefore "stateless," they purchased their citizenship and passports from Austria, and left for Israel in 1949. Israel had not contemplated so many Jewish survivors, and there simply was not enough housing for all of the immigrants. The family ran a café, but life was terribly difficult. Once again, Gitta had to live with strangers, as her parents unfolded cots at night and slept in the café. After 11 months, they returned to Belgium.

In 1952, Gitta and her parents came to New York, where her father worked in the rag recycling business. Gitta met Sidney Ginsberg at the local Jewish YMCA, and they married in 1957. They moved to Los Angeles in 1962 because of Gitta's father's failing health. Gitta and Sidney had two sons, Michael and Stewart, and Gitta now has two granddaughters, Jennifer and Stephanie. Gitta initially worked secretarial jobs, then worked at the Jewish Family Services Storefront, and has done plenty of volunteer work over the years. Currently, she is President of the California Association of Child Survivors of the Holocaust.

With each passing year, we lose more of our Holocaust survivors and the stories that only they can recount. We have a responsibility to continue pursuing and documenting these stories. Future generations must never deny the existence of the Holocaust, and must never feel as though they, like Gitta Ginsberg, were born in the wrong country at the wrong time.

John S. Gordon

By David Josephson

On March 19th, 1944, a young boy's life in Budapest, Hungary changed for the worst. The place Janos Szucs called home fell under Nazi rule. He watched, in horror, as Jews were ordered to sew the Star of David onto their clothing and as families were forced into ghettos. This boy survived this dark chapter in the history of the European Jewry. This boy survived through the discrimination of the Jews by Admiral Miklos Horthy, the Governor of Hungary, and the open genocide perpetrated later by the Prime Minister, Ferenc Szalasi. He survived through the good will of people who had it in their power and hearts to help, and eventually moved to the United States under the name John Gordon. Anti-Semitism is as old as Judaism itself and its virulence only seems to have gone up incrementally since around 27 AD. It started with exile, then evolved into ghettos, next into pogroms and institutional discrimination. This all continued to the point of gas chambers and ovens.

This little Hungarian boy was born in 1936 into a land where Jews were discriminated against, but were not in constant and dire physical danger. After the premature death of his father in 1939 at age 35, his working mother raised him until her deportation during the German occupation in 1944. After his mother's deportation and death, he spent one year of his life as a small child on the run from deportation and almost certain death. Living under difficult circumstances, he had to be ready to hide for extended periods of time at a moment's notice. He was hidden and saved with the help of false documents and family members. He had to move from building to building and had to trust complete strangers. He was forced through things no young eight-year-old should have experienced. He needed to believe in both the best and the worst in mankind in order to survive the raids and bombings until the Soviet liberation of Hungary.

This sounds like something an average American 30-year-old would have trouble with, but I am writing about an 8-year-old. When I was 8, I was worrying about toys and getting caught by my parents for making mischief, not worrying about food and Nazis. This story is completely astonishing because of all the things he had to endure.

The surviving Jews proved to the world that tragedies can be overcome. The complete lack of awareness about the history and customs of the Jewish people helped simmer tensions between Jews and gentiles. With the bulk of Europe not fully aware of what was happening to the European Jewry, the world could only speculate about what was actually going on.

The absolute worst part of John Gordon's experience was the loss of childhood. The worst moment of his entire experience was when his mother was taken away. One time, a gentile policeman had the courage to help take him to a safehouse for the night. This was one of his few recollections of the decency of native gentiles. The closest call he had was when the extremist Arrow Cross Party broke into the apartment house and tried to kill the Jews inside.

While Horthy tried to minimize deportations, Szalasi on the other hand, welcomed them as a way to consolidate control. With only sporadic and individual acts of resistance and limited

access to firearms and ammunition, there was almost no way to fight back. If you were caught out after curfew, you were either deported or executed immediately. The ghettos were locked down to the point where without extreme luck or good connections, there was no way out.

Rations were at bare minimum in the ghettos and Jews were banned from most establishments. Jews were given even fewer employment opportunities and were often forced into slave labor for the army during their battle against the Soviets.

These acts of survival by everyone from old men to small children show the true nature of the human condition and the Jewish peoples' unstoppable will to press on at all costs.

Assemblyman Nathan Fletcher
District 75

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivors

Benjamin Midler

Interviewed by Brianca Onori and Marissa Zebold

Benjamin Midler

By Brianca Onori and Marissa Zebold

Forgive, Yet Never Forget

A man once said, "It was really difficult to say for certain what helped me survive. Perhaps it was my youth. Perhaps I survived because I was so determined to survive this war. Or, maybe I am alive today because I was so strong-willed." This man was Benjamin Midler, a Holocaust survivor. Born on June 27, 1928, Benjamin grew up in Bialystock, Poland. He was raised in a middle-class, Kosher home with parents, Elihau and Gutke Midler, along with his brother and sister, Arie and Matilda. His father and mother owned a business where they distributed milk and other dairy products to civilians. Benjamin explained, "My family believed that being a Jew involves a willingness to help others, regardless of their religious devotion or not." Benjamin attended a private school where he enjoyed studying Hebrew. Bialystock was a harmonious community, in which people 70% of the people were Jews and Yiddish language was the most common language spoken.

Mr. Midler lived a joyous life. This came to a halt on one Friday morning of June 1941, when he began to live in the middle of a World War. Nazis invaded Bialystock and threatened to kill Benjamin and his family. Fortunately, the soldiers retreated. Later, one of the first massive Jewish incarcerations occurred when over two thousand men were taken from their homes and forced into the Great Synagogue. At the point of terror and confusion, the synagogue burst into flames with everyone inside and continued to burn for twenty-four hours. After this horrific catastrophe, Benjamin and his family were forced to wear the Yellow Star of David and were forbidden from living a Jewish-kosher life.

The beginning of the Nazi reign became completely obvious to Bialystock's communities and families when Jews were forced out of their homes and into ghettos. The ghetto was a place where Jews were forced to live by the Nazis who continually intimidated and ruthlessly robbed and killed the innocent Jews. The ghetto was so densely populated that the people were dying of malnutrition, disease, hunger, and the lack of medical supplies and sanitation.

Benjamin lived in a cramped two-bedroom apartment with his mother, two siblings, grandmother and her daughter-in-law, and her baby, on Wazka 1 Street. His dad had been out of communication after the Nazis had taken him regarding German business. Desperate for food at times, young Benjamin would sneak out of the ghetto and steal food from near by farming villages. While living in the ghetto, the Midler family built a bunker in which they could hide when the Nazis were searching and deporting Jews. During one of the searches and while in hiding, Benjamin and his uncle thought the Nazis had left, yet they were wrong. When coming out of the bunker, the two were immediately forced onto a train where hundreds of Jews were packed like sardines, moving onto their next destination, moving onto the unknown.

The unknown was something Benjamin experienced often throughout the suffered years of the Holocaust. After a painful separation from his entire family, Benjamin was then placed in seven different concentration camps, where he endured harsh conditions and inhumane

treatment. Throughout the time Benjamin spent surviving in these horrendous camps, he completed precarious acts just to increase his chance of survival. For example, Benjamin once stole food from the SS soldiers. Unfortunately, he was caught in action and brutally beaten in front of fellow captives as an example of to what would happen to those who attempted to break rules. Benjamin suffered the unsanitary conditions of having neither showers nor supplies to groom themselves. In place of toothbrushes, they would scrub their teeth's with their fingers using opaque water. This dirty style of living resulted in diseases such as typhus that spread quickly throughout the concentration camps. During the incomprehensible times of the Holocaust, Ben blocked out everything surrounding him: future and past. He lived for one thing only, and that was the hope to eventually see his family once again.

After enduring these conditions for years, the Jews that survived the concentration camps were finally liberated on May 5, 1945. At the turn of the war, Benjamin was able to bribe a German woman for a passport to the family he believed was in Poland. At this point, Benjamin was unaware of his family's nonexistence. He returned to Poland with the hope of finding his family. Unfortunately, there were few Jews left there. It was then that he realized the survival of his family members was highly unlikely. Benjamin then traveled illegally to Israel, but was caught. He had to live in a Cyprus camp for six months. He endured three more months in Atilt and Kiriat Samuel detention camps. He encountered two of his uncle's brothers, who were on their way to Israel.

"After the war, I became a dreamer. I had no personal ambition. Nor did I have any desire to accomplish something for myself," Benjamin explains as he describes the painful process of being held back by the war and the effects it had on him. Ben later became involved in an organization for immigrant teenage Holocaust survivors. He was treated with dignity, respect, and, for once in many months, as a human being. During his stay here, Mr. Midler received a letter from his aunt and uncle, which helped him deal with the fact that he had no family close by.

In 1948, the Israeli war for independence broke out, and Benjamin volunteered to fight. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed open to all Jews wishing to return to their homeland. Jewish survivors believed "that they would eventually surmount their previous obstacles," states Mr. Midler. He lived in Israel from 1951 to 1959, where he worked as a military policeman and served his country proudly. The happiest moment for Benjamin was when he met his future wife, Esther. They met through The Moshav, where the soldiers carried out their daily lives. The two met when the soldiers had a get-together with women, set up by a matchmaker, Mr. Meckler. They communicated via letters often and both knew they were destined to be together. After dating for six months, Benjamin and Esther finally tied the knot on January 16, 1951. When speaking of his life with Esther, Mr. Midler explains, "My marriage gave me more strength. I wanted to build a new family and I had the will and courage to teach my children not to be fearful of life, and always to succeed to the best of their ability." Esther and Ben first lived in The Moshav, where their first daughter, Tova, was born. Feeling nostalgic about her family in Haifa, Esther, Benjamin, and Tova moved there, where they had their second child, Nurit. Life in Haifa was rough, but Benjamin strived to provide everything he could for his family. Ben and Esther made the decision to move to America where a better life could be provided.

On June 30, 1959, the Midler family arrived in the United States of America, where Benjamin reunited with his Uncle Ben and Aunt Tillie. The birth of his third daughter, Ellelien, occurred in 1961. Living in America was prosperous. Benjamin was “willing to take risks” and he knew that now after the war, his life was in his own hands. He wanted to “make the best of it and seize control.”

Currently, Benjamin lives in San Diego, California with his wife of 59 years. He has learned to overcome the horrific events that occurred during the Holocaust by regularly speaking at UCSD and informing people of the time when Jews were stripped of their being and robbed of their souls. He also wrote a book, *The Life of a Child Survivor from Bialystock, Poland*, detailing the time he spent in concentration camps and the war in Israel. Benjamin says that one must forgive the Germans for their horrific actions, yet one can never forget them and how they changed the lives of millions.

The Holocaust was the mass destruction of six million Jews over a period of time, in which the Nazis reigned with terror. Benjamin Midler is one of the 350,000 survivors that grieve for those lost to the Nazis’ bloodlust.

Assemblymember Warren Furutani
District 55

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Robert Geminder *Interviewed by Yevgeniya Sosnovskaya*

Robert Geminder

By Yevgeniya Sosnovskaya

Holocaust through the Eyes of a Child

A child does not see the world through the same eyes as an adult. He absorbs the world around as a giant playground: forever expanding, always changing and full of excitement. A child cannot perceive war and death. He cannot understand murdering people for their ethnicity; he does not even know the meaning of the word 'ethnicity.' He knows that he is a Jew because his parents, his neighbors and his friends tell him, but he does not know that it is his ethnicity that makes him different from others.

Robert Geminder was only four years old when World War II began. He was born on August 3, 1935, in Wroclaw, Poland. He and his older brother, George, were growing up in a wonderful family, surrounded with love and attention of many relatives and friends. And then came the year 1939. Most likely, George and Robert did not notice any changes. Being young boys, they could not read the signs "Jews and dogs not allowed" on the doors of cafes and restaurants and did not know that their mother could not buy food anywhere because nobody would sell her, a Jew, anything. They did not understand why one day their parents packed in a hurry, and they all had to leave their house, filled with toys, memories and familiar colors and smells. But they certainly saw that the adults were scared and it made the kids scared, too. It was then that they first heard the words "war" and "Nazi," but those were just words for them, just empty shells. Those shells became filled with meaning later: when their family was running from the Germans; when their grandfather was taken by Gestapo; and when their father, Mano Geminder, died a day before the German army occupied Stanislawow. In that very city of Stanislawow, on October 12, 1941 the empty shells of the words "Nazi" and "death" must have turned into horrible monsters for two young boys.

On that day, twelve thousand Jews were murdered in the city cemetery by the order of the Gestapo. In the early morning, the Germans burst into the houses where Jewish families lived and kicked them out to the streets. As Robert's mother remembered later: "thousands and thousands of people. Sick and young, the very old and babies…" Families with children were put on the trucks, others walked behind. Very soon people began to realize that the road they followed was the road to the cemetery. What were they thinking then? Who can tell now? The enormity of the genocide – mass murder of people just for the reason of their ethnicity – can not be comprehended by normal human beings. Most likely, till the very last moment those men, women, and children did not believe the reality of what was happening. Bertl Geminder remembered: "They took the people all day. The people in the front, who came last, were first to die. When it got dark….We heard that whoever is left can go home… All of a sudden we felt that we were squeezed together. The Germans were holding hands around us, what was left …about 3,000 people were left, and they were squeezing us until one fell on top of the other, like a pyramid. I saw both of the boys falling to the ground… but I could not move a finger out of my position. I was falling to the ground on a heap of people…"

Miraculously, the Geminder family survived that horror. The boys lost consciousness, and their mother could not find them under the bodies. She was forced away by her brother from that awful place and left, almost sure that her mother and two sons were dead. But her boys survived: Robert's grandmother found them and brought them home and it was, truly, a miracle. The Jews, who lived through the massacre, were locked in the Stanislawow ghetto. Two little boys lived a very different life in a tiny, crowded, filthy apartment, in the room that they had to share with several other families. They had little to no food to eat and very few clothes to wear. George was eight years old, and Robert was six. Children in the ghetto were a hindrance. They could not work which meant they were of no use. Periodically, Germans would raid the ghetto with dogs, looking for children and killing those they found right on the spot. The brothers had to learn a lot of new things: how to stay motionless for hours and how to hold their breath when their grandmother hid them in the pantry during such "purges." They also had to learn to eat little crumbles of food that their mother managed to bring from her work outside the ghetto, and how to walk in the ghetto and stay invisible from the Germans. During such short walks they could see the bodies of Gestapo victims, hanging from lamp posts and scattered on the streets.

Realizing that the ghetto would be terminated soon, the boys' mother, Bertl, took a giant risk and managed to take her children outside of the ghetto. Her girlfriends hid them under their skirts and they passed the checkpoint, unnoticed. Bertl brought the boys to her work place and hid them in the closet where Robert and George had to stand silent and still for hours, with no food or water. After work, Bertl retrieved her boys and they fled to Warsaw, where they had to live as gentiles. However, both Robert and George still were under a constant threat, because with their dark hair and eyes they looked Jewish to many people. Bertl, striving to ensure the survival of her two boys, found a couple who lived on a farm outside of Krakow. She made a deal with them: after the war they would receive two apartment buildings that she owned in Germany, for the guaranteed safety of her children. The couple agreed, and the children were once again separated from their mother, and forced to live with a family they did not know and adapt to customs they did not understand, including going to the catholic mass every Sunday. They must have felt so alone, only having each other in the whole world. But even that was to be taken away from them.

Once, when Robert and George attended mass on Sunday, George forgot to remove his hat, and instantly, rumors began to spread that the boy was Jewish. The scared farmers now wanted to send the boys back. Their mother, however, could not take both. She came and picked up only George, leaving Robert behind. At the peak of the war, in 1942, the seven year old Robert was left all alone, forced to hide in a cramped attic, forbidden to come out for the fear of people would recognize him as a Jewish boy.

Robert remained trapped in that attic for two and a half months, often left without food or water for days. At nighttime he sneaked out of the attic window and picked fruit from nearby trees and took eggs from the chicken coop. Finally, Robert's mother returned for him. The boy was filthy, with lice in his hair, and the dirt and grime crusted onto his skin, but - alive. She took Robert back with her, to a town just outside of Warsaw. From then on, the family was forced to move from town to town, from city to city, always too afraid to stay in one place too long, because at any moment somebody could recognize them as Jews. In 1944, the Russian army was approaching Poland. Bertl and her second husband, Emil, decided that the family would be safer

in a large city, so they moved to Warsaw. At this point, the Polish underground in Warsaw rose up against the Germans. The Poles could not hold out and eventually Germans took over the city. Robert and his family were caught up in the rebellion and Germans sent them to Auschwitz along with thousands of others.

Bertl knew that Auschwitz meant certain death for any Jew. When they were brought to the train station, she noticed that one car of the train did not have a roof. She rushed to that car with her family and they managed to squeeze in, hoping for a miracle. Luckily the miracle happened. Prior to reaching Auschwitz, the train made a sudden stop. Robert's step-father helped him out over the wall of the roofless car, and told him to open the door, locked from the outside. Little Robert managed to do just that and the family ran, never looking back. They found refuge in a farmhouse belonging to a Polish gentile family. Later, they went to yet another town and found a place to live there. In 1944, the Russian army liberated that town. Soon after that, the Geminder family moved to Czechoslovakia, and from there to Germany, to the American territory. They stayed in the American camp for refugees for awhile and then, in 1945, immigrated to the United States. Their new life began. In this new life there were many events and many people and also there were memories. And yes, it's true that a child sees the world through the different eyes than an adult, but these children, survivors of the Holocaust, were not children anymore. After all they had been through, after all the horrors they had seen, their eyes were not children's eyes anymore and nor were their memories children's memories. For many years Robert Geminder kept these memories and shared them with people. He prepared for publication interviews with his mother, in which she tells her story of survival, day by day. He accepted invitations to speak about Holocaust at schools, libraries, colleges and other venues. He spoke, and continues to speak, of his childhood that never was. In his story, through the years, we hear the voices of millions of little boys and girls who wanted so little, just to be children, but whose lives were destroyed by the Holocaust. We must keep these voices in our memories and tell our children about them.

Visitors of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. must not miss the plaque with the words on it: "Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be a perpetrator. Above all, thou shalt not be a bystander." Nobody's eyes, no adult's and no children's must see another Holocaust. But history does not happen by itself, we make it happen.

Assemblymember Ted Gaines

District 4

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Renee Tully *Interviewed by Sarah Pritchard*

Renee Tully

By Sarah Pritchard

The Life of a Holocaust Survivor

Beginning in 1933 and ending 1945, the Holocaust lasted 12 long and torturous years. Adolf Hitler, a man who had come to power in the early 1930s, and the Nazi party, persecuted and planned the horrible torture and murder of millions of Jewish individuals living in Europe. While an unbelievable number of people were killed during the Holocaust, there were those who managed to survive the ghettos, concentration camps, and constant torture brought upon them by Hitler and the Nazis. I had the privilege of hearing the incredible story of an amazing woman who experienced the horrors of the Holocaust first hand. Renee Tully willingly shared the story of her years trying to survive the hellish times of the Holocaust.

Ursula Renate Hetch was born February 6, 1926 in a town in eastern Germany, where she had a relatively normal childhood. When she was 8 years old, her parents divorced. After the divorce, Renee and her mother migrated to France where she went to school and learned the French language. She was living in France when she first felt the effects of the beginning of the Holocaust. Things began to change as World War II broke out. When it was required that the Jewish people wear the Star of David, her mother wouldn't allow it. They changed their names and it was decided that Ursula was to be known as Renee Tully for the rest of her life. She was also forced to leave school. It was then that her mother moved to Southern France.

While the war was going on it was very difficult for Renee and her mother to stay in contact, so they rarely spoke. Sadly, she had no idea how her mother was doing. One day, she was home when she heard a knock at the door. When she answered the knock, she was surprised to see a handsome young man standing at the door offering to take her to see her mother. Without knowing what was really occurring, she got dressed and left with the man. Sure enough she was reunited with her mother, but not under the conditions she was hoping for. The two were being taken to Auschwitz, one of the most well-known labor and death camps of the Holocaust. She tried multiple times to escape before she was moved to another camp located in Czechoslovakia. While at this new camp, her work was to make mortar shells. Living in this camp, she witnessed many deaths. She found that the dead were taken to a shed or carried in black bags to a gravesite and buried. Renee remembers one of the worst parts of this camp being the "selection." She remembers a famous doctor looking over women and determining whether or not they were good enough to go to the "pleasure house" or not. She says the hardest part of the camp was witnessing her mother being looked over during this selection. Renee was very happy to see her mother was not wanted and they were able to be together again. Sometime later, Renee and her mother relocated to another camp. While at this camp, her mother became very ill. Tully also became sick with jaundice. Because time meant nothing to her anymore, she was not aware of how long she was at this camp. Through some miracle, Renee was able to escape on a train to France.

After Renee was freed from the death camps, she still experienced several hardships. At one point she even lost her home. After World War II had subsided, she was able to get a visa in order to move to the United States after waiting more than seven years. Once in America, she

found a job and later met her husband, who has sadly passed away. Renee states that she loves it here and wouldn't change a thing.

In the words of Renee Tully, "Life is funny and things happen." She holds the mindset that what happened already happened and she can't change it. She says that she doesn't blame anyone for what has happened, she only resents the gullibility of society. It is quite obvious that many people can learn from this extraordinary woman who believes that we can only make the best of what has happened in the past.

Assemblymember Mary Hayashi
District 18

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Stan Felson *Interviewed by Ellen Ryan*

Acknowledgements

Rabbi Harry A. Manhoff, Ph.D
Temple Beth Sholom
San Leandro, CA

Rita Clancy, MSW
Holocaust Survivor Program Coordinator
Jewish Family and Children's Services of the East Bay
Berkeley, CA

Stan Felson

By Ellen Ryan

I was born in Glubokie, Poland, an area in what is now Belarus, a town of about 10,000 people. In Poland only 10% of the population was Jewish but in Glubokie about 60% of the people were. My father had a small business. He used to buy grain and take it to the mill to make flour. Our town was a regional center; it had a town square, a weekly farmers' market and was surrounded by four main streets. Our house, like others in the town, was about 500 square feet and had a large vegetable garden with a milk cow. There wasn't any plumbing instead there was a nearby well with public baths.

My schooling began at age five with three years of private school to learn Hebrew. This was followed by five years in public school and then a year learning bookkeeping. Even though I was a good student, I was unable to find a job. That is why I went to work with my father in the store.

The Russians came in 1939 when Russia took over a large part of Poland in an agreement with the Nazis. My father was forced to close his store as it was a "capitalist" enterprise. Financially, things got more difficult, but worse than that was the sense of fear that pervaded our lives. Even though Glubokie was technically part of Russia at this point, my mother's Russian relatives were still inaccessible because of the Russians' mistrust of the Poles and their refusal to allow them to cross the border. Some wealthier Poles were sent to Siberia, which ironically was their salvation. Sooner or later, those who stayed behind were shot.

The Germans came to Glubokie in the summer of 1941, right up our street. After their arrival life became very difficult and they established a ghetto into which all the Jews were forced to move. My aunt's house was within the boundary, so my parents, my two brothers and I moved in. The Germans formed a council of Jewish community leaders called the Judenrat and it had its own police force to act as intermediary with the Jewish population. They cooperated with the Germans because they thought it would protect the Jews from annihilation. In the end, of course, it did not. We would hear reports from refugees from other parts of Poland of large groups of Jews, Russians and gypsies being killed, so we knew what was coming and we were terrified. The Germans killed 19,000 Jews in Polotsk the first year. 47,000 Russian prisoners of war were killed in the winter of 1941. In our ghetto in two incidents, 150 Jews were taken away and shot between December, 1941, and spring, 1942. Worse was yet to come.

In June of 1942, strangers, the SD, German executioners, all came to town and massacred 2,500 Jews, which was half the Jewish population of the town. The day before, a German doctor told my brother, who worked in a small clinic, not to go home to sleep that night, so I didn't go home either. As we learned the next day, my parents and my younger brother hid in the attic that night. The next morning, the Nazis separated "essential" and "non-essential" workers. The "non-essential" group was taken into the forest to where great trenches had been dug. They were forced to lie down naked in rows on top of each other. Then they were machine gunned and buried. After the massacre, the deepening sense of loss and dread made life an agony. But at least our family was still together.

As the months passed, I began to look for a way to escape. At first I hesitated for fear my disappearance might bring harm to my family. But I also knew that to stay would sooner or later be fatal. All Jews were being killed eventually. An opportunity presented itself in November of 1942. A couple of Jewish partisans (the Resistance) came to town to take escaped Jews from other towns into the forest for refuge. I joined the group as they escaped the ghetto. After a couple of days' travel, we met a Partisan leader, who recruited me and another fellow to join his group. I had no weapon, no experience or training, but I was glad to join. We built shelters in the forest by digging down a few feet and covering the space with a roof of tree trunks, straw and earth. We scavenged the local farms for donations of food and had plenty. I volunteered for missions to bring weapons or refugees across the front. Sometimes I would find myself in a tight spot, get lost, or be shot at, but I generally had luck on my side, always making it safely back to my group. The Partisans controlled certain territory so we could feel relatively safe in those areas.

I made up my mind in April of 1943 to return to Glubokie and try to rescue my family. I didn't even know for sure if they were still alive. It was very dangerous to go back and it took several days to make contact, first with my brother Don, then with our parents. Eventually, my mother, my younger brother Labele, and Don met me where I was waiting for them in hiding outside the town. My father did not come with them. He had been afraid to leave. I learned later that the head of the Jewish police had made an example of him – when Don didn't show up for work, the police arrested my father, my aunt, and a cousin. All three were shot as punishment. The fact that my mother and brothers got out was a victory, but my father's death was a tragedy that has stayed with me all my life.

We headed east from Glubokie because it seemed the safest, and I was able to secure a place for my mother and Labele in the home of a widow and her daughter, who welcomed them, in a village called Liasiny, in a Partisan enclave. In retrospect, this was a tragic choice, but again, I was doing the best I could while trying to make difficult decisions with little to go on. Some months later we learned that the Germans had conducted a search and destroy mission in the area they were in. I made my way back to Liasiny to find that the whole village had been burned down – the concept of partisan territory was an illusion. The widow told me they had been killed, betrayed by a local farmer.

Don and I had joined another group of Partisans in the area, as my original group had gone west when I went to search for my family. Our leader was a Russian Jew named Meyerson, who put me in charge of a combat group of about twenty men. And we were armed. We kept moving, sometimes living in the forest and sometimes in the homes of farmers, mainly we survived. While we did our best to avoid confrontations with the Germans, we would occasionally get caught in an ambush. One time, I was shot in the leg during one of our missions. I healed up in about a month, with the help of a good nurse and some homemade vodka.

In December of 1943, I was overjoyed to find the son of a neighbor from before the war. In August, the ghetto had been burned to the ground. David's father had boosted him up to the roof of a bakery and he climbed inside and hid in a barrel. Because it was built with cement, the bakery did not burn. He was being hidden by five sisters and all were Catholic spinsters who

risked their lives to shelter him. I took him with me and he was with our group until we were liberated. We kept in contact for the rest of his life.

Back in the east, in the spring of 1944, our missions against the Germans continued. We didn't have tanks or planes, but we had dynamite, and we put it to good use blowing up railroad tracks. We would set a series of twenty or thirty charges along a section of track, with successively shorter fuses. We'd light the longest ones first, all the way down, then run 100 feet or so, and listen to the explosions. I actually enjoyed that.

At about that time I learned of some Gentile collaborators who helped the Germans slaughter the Jews in a town near Glubokie. We arrested several of them and turned them over to Meyerson. They were interrogated and executed. When we were liberated by the Soviets, I was also able to find and arrest a couple of policemen from our town and turn them over to the Soviets. The police had been a lot worse than the Germans in their brutality.

We were liberated in the spring of 1944, with the march of the Red Army through the area. Don joined the Soviet army and I worked at different jobs until the end of the war in 1945. We went from home to Poland, then to Germany to a Displaced Persons camp in the American zone. It was there, where we felt free for the first time. Of the possibilities open to us from there, we decided to seek our futures in America. Our mother's sister Katie lived in San Francisco. My mother had written to her in the 1930s when Hitler came to power, appealing to her to try to save at least one member of our family, who could then bring the rest of the family later, as people did back then. After some difficulty, we were able to locate and correspond with Auntie Katie, and she sponsored us to come to the United States. Since she had come to the U.S. before World War I she was shocked to hear that all of her family was killed.

We set to work immediately on our arrival, learning English and getting jobs. We felt very lucky in this new city, which seemed like paradise compared to the hell we had just left. I soon began working as a salesman for Watkins products. After that I started selling plastic tablecloths, which took me to Portland, Oregon. There I met and married Pearl. We started our own tablecloth business in Seattle, where we lived for seven years, and had three sons. Don had also married and he went into the construction business with our uncle in San Francisco. We returned to San Francisco in 1958 and I, too, went into the construction business.

Stan Felson has lived in Hayward for several decades, and continues to work on construction projects such as renovating a craftsman house he has owned for forty years. His wife Pearl passed away in 2009, but he remains close to his sons and their families. His son Leonard gives an account of an emotional journey back to Glubokie in 1993, for a memorial service fifty years after the Nazis annihilated the ghetto. Over the years in the United States he has met other survivors from time to time and spent hours sharing accounts of their strife and survival. But he was ambivalent about returning to the place of such great pain and loss. All three sons went with him "back home" to bear witness. Again and again, the sight of people from the past, or their surviving family members, brought forth tears.

Leonard wrote of the experience when they reached Glubokie, "Fellow survivors, who had arrived from Israel, Germany, other parts of Belarus and the United States, swarmed our car

in a bubbling mixture of Hebrew, Yiddish and Russian. Like an ultimate class reunion, they hugged and kissed each other through their tears and joyous laughter. I had never seen my father so alive. That week, when he cried you could feel the pain and sorrow. When he laughed, it was uninhibited joy. From early morning until past midnight, I saw a father engaged with life, talking mostly in Yiddish to long-ago friends whose lives also had been haunted by the Holocaust. The world he lost left a permanent, hovering pain he never has shaken. I never could empathize with his yearning for the irreplaceable until one quiet afternoon in Glubokie, when I sat on the back porch of the only surviving Jew's house. I sensed the calm of the town and what it must have felt like to be surrounded by lifelong friends and extended family, and I understood my father's loss."

Assemblymember Ed Hernandez, O.D.
District 57

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

William Z. Good, M.D.

Interviewed by Corina Martinez and Steven Muñoz

Acknowledgements

Jack Brauns, M.D., FACS
Holocaust Survivor
Author, "Recollections and Reflections"

William Z. Good, M.D.

By Corina Martinez and Steven Muñoz

Holding on to Humanity: A Holocaust Survivor's Story

When looking at the history of World War II and the Holocaust, as well as listening to the narratives of its victims and survivors, people generally characterize the period as a time of undeniable inhumanity. For those who lived during the war and escaped Nazi brutality because they were either not Jewish or not considered undesirable by the party, acknowledging the inhumanity is also a confrontation with their complicity. Understandably, many remained silent instead of openly condemning Nazi crimes out of fear for their lives and those of their loved ones, but their silence allowed the Holocaust to happen and to continue. For everyone, including those born in the decades following the end of the Holocaust, a sense of guilt and horror is felt because they are all confronted with the potential for wickedness that humans have. Compounding this guilt and horror is the question of how one can retain dignity and humanity when treated so inhumanely, and whether, if given the chance, one would respond to inhumane treatment in kind.

In 1943, four years after the outbreak of World War II and the accompanying Holocaust, William Z. Good was given the opportunity for retribution. William was the eldest son in a well-to-do Jewish family of four. His father, Dov, ran a turpentine factory in the town of Niemenczyn, located in Poland. The factory workers were all non-Jewish locals to whom Dov was very kind. Dov's kindness proved life-saving when on September 20, 1941, one of these locals, Felicja Paszkowska, came to warn the family that the Nazis were having her husband and others dig a mass grave with the intention of executing all the local Jews. William's mother, Chana, and his little brother, Motl, hid underneath a massive pile of firewood nearby the turpentine factory for two days. On the third day, feeling restless, Motl left the shelter, and was caught by Niemenczyn police and taken to jail for execution under Nazi orders. Chana grew worried when Motl did not return that night and she too left the hiding place in search of him. After finding out that Motl had been caught and was at the jail waiting for execution, Chana decided to surrender herself to the police and die alongside her son so that he would not spend his last moments alone. A few days later they were killed. William was in hiding during those days and recalls hearing the gunshots that killed his mother and brother, but was unaware that it was they who were executed until two weeks later.

Two years later, in 1943, William confronted two Niemenczyn policemen while he was in hiding in an empty barn. He and his Russian friend managed to disarm the men. During his time on the run, William became a very sharp shooter and carried a very powerful handgun loaded with six bullets. While holding them at gunpoint, William interrogated the men about their participation in the executions of his mother and brother. William contemplated killing the officers, but the men begged him to spare their lives and denied involvement in the deaths of his mother and brother. Frustrated with the possibility that he could be killing two innocent men, William released the officers telling them to "run" before he change his mind. For a long time William felt great shame that he denied himself retribution against the Nazis for everything they had done to him and other Jews.

The execution of Chana and Motl was one of many actions perpetrated by the Nazis that William experienced. In June 1941, he heard a rumor that the Nazis intended to castrate all young men in Wilno, Poland, where he then lived. Scared of the possibility of the Nazis coming after him, he and another friend packed a bag, some clothes, and rode their bikes to Minsk (then part of Russia). The Nazis had arrived in Minsk before William and his friend. William recalls seeing the Nazis gunning down civilians from low-flying planes. His friend was shot and killed by one of these planes while standing by his side. Completely alone, William decided to return home.

Not long after his arrival in Wilno, a Nazi who was rounding up Jews captured William. He, along with the other Jews, were taken to a park and told they would be cleaning up the ruins from the bombardments the following morning. When the morning came they were put on trucks covered in canvas and taken to the Ponary ravine. Once they arrived, drunken Lithuanian soldiers holding machine guns met them. As the soldiers forced him and the other Jews to approach the ravine, William became aware that the ravine was functioning as a mass grave where he and the others would be executed. William stumbled at the same moment a soldier shot at him. The soldier was too drunk to notice that the gunshot did not hit William and he was not dead. William knew that he would be killed if he moved; he lay still as the bloody bodies of other Jews fell on top of him. These bodies protected him; the soldiers were aware that not everyone was dead and proceeded to spray bullets at all of those in the grave to ensure their deaths. Once the soldiers left, William was able to escape by digging a hole under the barbed-wire fence surrounding the grave. William was one of five survivors to escape the massacre at Ponary.

On his way back to Wilno, a peasant family helped William by giving him food and a change of clothes. When he reached Wilno, he told his family about what had happened and what he had seen. Although his family believed him, other Jews did not. Dov decided to move the entire family back to their home in Niemenczyn, but the Nazis had already stationed several Lithuanian Nazis at their home and the turpentine factory. These Lithuanians worked closely with William's family until William's father received Felicja's warning the night of September 20, 1941. The following morning, William narrowly escaped death at the hands of Steponas Nera, the Lithuanian he thought was a friend. His father also escaped execution that morning when Niemenczyn police captured him. They remained in hiding separately until November 1941, when they were reunited.

For the next two-and-a-half years, Dov and William were on the run. During the summers, they would hide out in snake-infested swamps. During the winters, several peasant families responded to Dov's kindness before the war and risked their lives to hide him and his son. Stas Konsiewicz, Josef, and Ilewicz are several people whose kindness William greatly treasures. The kindness that stands out to William, though, was that of his father. Not only did Dov's kindness save their lives, but it also saved the lives of other Jews: during those years Dov supported seven other escapees. When William questioned Dov's decision to give a family of five half of his savings to guarantee their safety, Dov replied, "My son, do you know whether a month from now – a week from now – you or I will be alive? Do you have assurance that we will need that money ever?" Dov's words and actions deeply affected William, who described himself as angry throughout the ordeal. He directed this anger at the two Niemenczyn police

officers he captured in 1943, but having learned from his father's behavior, he restrained himself from acting on that anger.

As the Red Army advanced toward Poland and Lithuania in 1944, Dov and William acknowledged that the war was turning against the Germans. When they first set sight on Soviet tanks in July 1944, they emerged from their underground bunker filled with joy, knowing they had survived the war. It was time for them to move on and figure out what they would do with their lives. Throughout the time William was on the run he carried his diploma in his boot heel. The nails that William had hammered into the heel when he repeatedly had to repair his boots throughout the war tore the document. The torn document proved to be somewhat of an obstacle when William arrived in Torino, Italy after the war with the intention to enroll in medical school. Furthermore, there was a language barrier: the president of the university did not speak Polish, and William did not speak Italian. William, however, did speak some German, which allowed him to communicate with the president via a translator. The condition of William's diploma and the language issue required that it be verified, and the university president gave him instructions on how to do so. Three months later, William was enrolled in the medical program, but not without more obstacles. William still could not speak Italian and had to learn it almost immediately because of an upcoming exam. With the help of an Italian/English dictionary and an English/Polish dictionary, William was able to prepare for the exam, as well as learn two new languages.

William continued to overcome adversity and demonstrate determination even after the war and enrolling in medical school. He was unable to receive a scholarship, so he made a living by teaching Hebrew in the Jewish community of Rome. He and two other students, also WWII survivors, established a Jewish student home for refugees, where he met his wife, Pearl. After completing medical school in 1951 at the University of Torino Faculty of Medicine and Surgery he moved to the United States. Two years later, on June 7, 1953, he and Pearl were married. On July 7, 1954, she gave birth to their first son. The firstborn was later followed by a set of fraternal twins: a boy and a girl.

Neither William nor Pearl ever kept their experiences from their children, however, when they were very young and inquired whether William had ever killed any Germans (and how many), his response was that he would tell them when they were older. When his daughter, Anne, turned thirteen she once again asked how many Germans he had killed, reminding him that he had promised to tell her when she was older, and she was indeed now older. William told her the story about capturing the two Niemenczyn policemen and how he released them. As earlier related, William had always felt shame about giving up his chance for retribution, but he was surprised and relieved when Anne embraced him and said, "Dad, I'm so glad you've never killed another human being." This was one of the most important moments of his life, and again reassured him that he had done the right thing.

People often overlook the humanity that prevailed during the Holocaust, but even at thirteen, Anne was able to acknowledge and value it. Whether it was the victims of subhuman crimes or those who came to their aid that demonstrated humanity, it is evident that humanity can exist and even flourish in the most inhumane times. Moreover, it is a sense of humanity that can keep people alive. The reciprocating kindness between Dov and the peasants kept him and

William alive. Dov's kindness kept other Jews alive in an environment where most would typically think of their own survival first. Instead of taking advantage of retribution, William chose to retain his humanity, and it saved the lives of those two Niemenczyn police officers. When reflecting on the Holocaust, we should all acknowledge this and value the potential we all have to be exemplary human beings, not just for our own sake, but also for the sake of others.

Assemblymember Jerry Hill
District 19

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Ellen van Creveld *Interviewed by Elizabeth Wilson*

Acknowledgements

Ruth Willdorff, survivor

Ellen van Creveld

By Elizabeth Wilson

Mrs. van Creveld's Remarkable Story

'In a world where humans are free to do right and to do wrong there will always be evil actions. If the Holocaust is to teach us anything, it must be a realization that one has to speak out against evil. Even a limited, uncertain, anguished fight against the darkness is better than surrendering to the evils of the past and the present day.'
– Rabbi Albert Friedlander

With the words of Rabbi Friedlander ringing in my ears, I walked up the stairs with great anticipation to interview and document the story of Ellen Leonie Werthauer van Creveld - a Holocaust survivor. She greeted me graciously and said she was honored to tell me her story and answer my questions, and so we began. I learned that today she is an active participant in the Bay Area Hidden Children Group, which is a networking and support group for the hidden children during the Holocaust living in the Bay Area, and that she has helped compile a book on the Hidden Children.

I met and interviewed her in her home in Belmont. The first thing she said was that she was a much loved child whose every whim was met. I asked Mrs. van Creveld if the experience of being a hidden child had changed her outlook on life. She replied, "Yes, very different." She went on to say that she was the youngest child and was very spoiled. However, as a hidden child, she had to become strong, handle difficult situations, and cope; she could not be spoiled. Mrs. van Creveld then told the story of a family who hid a fleeing family and in return had to send their children away, because children "talk." She went on to say that houses in their neighborhood were right next to each other, so the hidden family had to be discreet. Children could not talk, toilets could not be flushed when the family was not home, and one could not walk around too much.

This all changed when the family fled. Ellen van Creveld was born in Amsterdam, Holland in 1933 to a well-to-do, non-religious family. She was doted on by her extended family, nannies and particularly her father. She attended private school. She remembers her extended family visiting, and talking of moving to other continents. Her family plan was to immigrate to South America. On May 10, 1940, the war came to Amsterdam. Her mother, father, two brothers and she all fled to Ijmuiden to travel to England. They waited on the beach for a ship to take them to England, but the ships had stopped transporting fleeing immigrants. Since they could not make it to England, they returned home. She remembers the shock of returning home to her own bed, after sleeping on the beach, to find that friends from Rotterdam had been bombed out and were now at their home. The bright side was she got to sleep with her parents when she got scared. Ellen was a bright, innocent and vivacious child of 6 years old who thought her parents could protect her from anything. School resumed five days after Holland's capitulation and she returned to learning and playing with her classmates. For two years, life went on. Little Ellen did not know she was Jewish. She did not know that the fighting was about the extermination of the Jewish race. She was a protected and pampered little girl. Her home life changed over the

two year period when her aunt immigrated to Philadelphia in 1939, which meant that her grandmother now lived with Ellen's family.

In October 1942 she could no longer attend the private school with her friends, but instead had to wear a Yellow Star at all times and had to attend a Jewish school. Despite this, many families in the neighborhood were very supportive of her family during these difficult times. By 9, Ellen was an independent spirit. Her family faced daily the difficulty of transportation, for they could not ride public transportation or bicycles, and all vehicles had been confiscated. Because of Ellen's strength and personality, even though she was no longer allowed to enter homes of some of her friends, she did so anyway and continued her friendships with her classmates. To this day, she still is in contact with a friend from 1st grade! Mrs. van Creveld witnessed teachers and children disappearing from her neighborhood and new families joining them. When the Joodse Raad (Jewish Council) moved into her Jewish school, she and other children entered sealed homes to retrieve belongings of families who were rounded-up by the authorities and housed in the school gym. In September 1943 only three children remained at the school.

Ellen learned what fear was during this time. Her grandmother, father, and brothers were rounded up but fortunately were allowed to return home. The second time, her grandmother was rounded up, Ellen never saw her again.

On November 5, 1943, Ellen's father came home and said the family was to be picked up that night. She remembers leaving her home with each person carrying one bag! She and her parents were hidden with a family in Amsterdam-West; her brothers with a family from her father's office. They were not allowed outside for a few weeks while they waited for the Underground to take them to the railroad station. The Underground gave them new names and Ellen's parents false papers. They traveled to Utrecht. Ellen said she felt odd being outside and not wearing a Yellow Star. In Utrecht, she and her family hid beneath a retail store located on the canal.

Ellen and her family's flight to freedom must have been terrifying. She remembers that they went by train to Bergen op Zoom and were then placed on a bus destined for Putten at the Belgian border that didn't have room for her parents; she screamed and cried until her parents were allowed on the bus. When the bus arrived in Putten they got off and walked to the Belgian border. At the border they had to crawl through a barbed wire fence, where a lady on a bicycle said the guards were at the far end. Ellen and her family took the trolley to Antwerp and then the train to Brussels.

Mrs. van Creveld remembers the contrast of life in Amsterdam, Holland with her new life in Brussels. She did not have to wear the Yellow Star. There was plenty of food. December 1943 in Brussels was very festive for Christmas and her entire family was together. The family had moved from the Underground boardinghouse into a private home where her father had rented a few rooms. Ellen was entered into a small private school, saw a few of her classmates (also using other names) from her school in Amsterdam and learned her first French words. Mrs. van Creveld was truly happy.

Her family began preparations to secretly leave for Spain. It was not to be. First her father got sick, and then Ellen got diphtheria, so they could not leave. At this time they lived in an apartment in the Schaerbeek section of Brussels. On April 6, 1944, her mother and younger brother were out shopping, and crossed the street so that their feet would not get wet. At that time, Jacques, Brussels' Jewish traitor, was picking up a Dutch Jewish family who was hidden across the street from Ellen's family. Jacques picked up Ellen's mother and younger brother and took them to the Avenue Louise, Gestapo Headquarters and then returned for Ellen and her father.

Mrs. van Creveld said she lost her hearing in both of her ears because of the diphtheria and that is why she survived this horrible time. Because of the diphtheria, she was sent to the hospital section of the former Jewish orphanage on Chaussee Boondael. She remembers vividly that before getting a bowl of soup, she had to sit listening to a language she couldn't understand, her first introduction to Seder.

Mrs. van Creveld stated that her older brother, Hans, was not picked up because he was late getting home. Only Mrs. van Creveld and Hans survived the Holocaust. Hans traveled to Normandy and joined the Army.

In May 1944, she was sent to a home in Linkebeek for Jewish children under 16, where life was restricted and crowded. Later she was transported to Aische, an old castle in ruins near Namur.

In August 1944, the Germans told the children that they were going to transport them back to Germany. Farmers heard of their plight and took them in. Ellen enjoyed the freedom of exploring the countryside and eating white bread.

On her 11th birthday in September 1944, she was given a birthday party by the 101th Tank Unit soldiers and received a surprise visit from her older brother Hans. She remembers the chocolates. However, in December 1944 the Germans launched a counteroffensive. Mrs. Creveld recalls that the noise was terrifying.

In May 1945, the complete European liberation occurred. An employee from her father's office in Brussels came for her and dropped her off at a distant relative in Brussels. Ellen was still sick and spent the summer at Coxijde's seashore to recuperate. In September 1945 her distant relative made arrangements with the Red Cross to have Ellen returned to Holland. Ellen did not want to go to another children's home so when she got to Eindhoven's Repatriation Center (het Veemgebouw from Phillips) she told the authorities that she had friends in Amsterdam. A long drive later, she was reunited with her close girlfriend, Ernie, and her family. She lived with them until July 1946 when she left for the United States to live with her mother's sister’s family.

Ellen loved life in the United States, went to school, made friends, and enjoyed life. Unfortunately, her uncle became sick, and she was no longer welcomed. Hans decided that Ellen should return to Amsterdam, Holland where she became a war foster child. Mrs. van Creveld spoke of the pain of hiding her personality as a foster child. Later, she obtained her college

degree so that she could achieve her dreams. She stated that living in Holland at this time was horrible and she felt very alone. She said that living in Holland was meaningless, because she had lost both of her parents and she had nothing left there.

My eyes were opened not only to the plight, shock, and vulnerability of children during the Holocaust, but to the extreme danger and upheaval that sympathetic families were willing to endure to protect the children and families of this injustice. They faced upheaval themselves when hiding fleeing families, and children that sometimes their own children had to be sent away. In listening to Mrs. van Creveld my heart was broken and enlightened all at the same time. I was sad for what Mrs. van Creveld went through, but glad that she was able to move on and seems to have come full circle in her life today.

But who will continue to tell the story of the Holocaust when the children of the survivors are gone? I believe it is up to us, the students. Mrs. Ellen van Creveld is a strong and brave individual and we must continue to remember the struggles she went through in order to make sure nothing like the Holocaust can ever happen again.

Assemblymember Alyson Huber
District 10

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Bernard Marks

Interviewed by Jordana Steinberg and Anita Cisneros

Bernard Marks

By Jordana Steinberg and Anita Cisneros

A Survivor's Voice

Sometimes parents give us directions like, "Do your homework!" or "Go to bed!" or "You are not going to Starbucks today before religious school so stop complaining!" This can irritate us and make us forget the blessings that we have and how lucky we are.

These blessings became very clear to us when we heard Bernie Marks talk about his horrible experiences during the Holocaust.

Bernie's life before World War II was just like the life of any other kid of his day. In fact, Bernie told a story about how he would jump on the back of the trolley car so he wouldn't have to pay the fee, or how, after school, he would visit his aunt so he could ride up and down the elevator in her apartment building. Then, she would treat him to an ice cream cone. He was able to go where he wanted, say what he felt, and enjoy his freedom, just like any other child in Lodz, Poland.

Bernie Marks was born Ber Makowski in a modern industrial town of Lodz, Poland. Both of his parents and their parents were born in Lodz, Poland as well.

The Jews in Lodz were mostly Orthodox, some Modern Orthodox, and some Reform. All branches of Judaism practiced their religion, and lived harmoniously together. That harmony in the Jewish community was the target of the invading Nazis, who used the local Christian population of German (Volksdeutche) heritage to begin the persecution of the Jews.

Life for Bernie dramatically changed on September 9th, 1939, upon the invasion by the Germans. Bernie was on the Freedom Plaza, handing out slices of watermelons to the Polish troops going to the front. What he saw was unbelievable. The German troops were greeted by Poles and Germans with flowers and the "Heil Hitler" salute. We can't imagine what it would be like to wake up one day and have freedom to go to school and see friends, and then the next day, be forced to live in a ghetto.

All the Jewish people had ten minutes to vacate everything and to hurry to an area called *Baluty*, which was a slum area of the city in Lodz. *Baluty* became the ghetto, which was formed in March 1940, surrounded by barbed wire. German guards were posted all around to make sure no one escaped. Outside of the perimeter signs were posted that read, "FORBIDDEN TO ENTER THIS IS A JEWISH AREA."

It is hard to comprehend what life was like inside the ghetto if you did not live there. Everybody had to register with the Gestapo. Bernie had to contend with a list of what was not allowed: no radios, no cameras, no furs or any other luxury. Electricity and heating were not permitted between the hours of 6pm and 6am.

Hans Biebow, a Nazi party member, was appointed by the authorities in Berlin to oversee the Lodz ghetto. Recognizing the expertise of the Jews in the garment, leather and other industries, Biebow formed additional factories that produced pre-fabricated cement slabs for housing construction projects. The appointed Eldest of the Jews (Judenradt), Chaim Rumkowski, and Hans Biebow formed many factories using the Jews in the Ghetto as slave laborers.

In exchange for their labor, the Jews, Bernie was provided meager food rations of 600 calories a day. The daily rations had no meat, no fat. The food consisted primarily of turnips, some vegetables, sugar beets, bread, sugar, some potato rations, and imitation coffee.

Bernie's father, Joseph, was Bernie's angel. He registered his son with the Gestapo as being born in 1927. As a result, Bernie was able to get a work permit that allowed him to work in a tailor shop as a cloth cutter for nearly four years. The job provided him with meals, including soup, in addition to the meager food rations of 600 calories a day given to their Jewish prisoners. The daily rations had no meat, no fat. The food consisted primarily of turnips, some vegetables, sugar beets, bread, sugar, some potato rations, and imitation coffee.

In August of 1944, Bernie's entire family was "shipped" off to Auschwitz in boxcars. In each boxcar there were 80-100 people. In Bernie's boxcar, people were screaming, children crying, people dying for lack of sanitation, and hardly any food. The trip should have lasted 6 hours, but instead, it lasted 2 days and 3 nights. Upon arrival, the Nazis opened the boxcar, and determined who was to live in and who was to die. After the selection, the heads of all the men, including Bernie and his father, were shaved and their bodies sprayed with a white powder. They were issued a cap, a pair of pants and a shirt without pockets. Bernie remembers that they looked like a set of pajamas, gray and blue in color. Finally, the men were assigned a number (Bernie's was 96136 and his father's was 96135) which was tattooed into their left arm. They were told, "You have no name - you are a number and do not forget this."

The following day, they were assigned to huge barracks, and given their task, moving heavy rocks to build roads. "The September summer days were hot and very humid, we sweated a lot, and were not allowed any water, only very little food at the end of the work day," Bernie remembers. Then came a new selection, and again, Bernie and father were selected to be sent to Dachau concentration camp. The trip lasted 4 days and 4 nights with no food and no water. 25% of the people in the boxcars died from exhaustion and lack of nutrition. Those who survived this long journey piled the dead bodies in a corner of the box car.

Bernie speaks at length about what his arrival was like. "Our transport arrived in Dachau at night, all boxcars were pushed to another track, where we remained over night, still locked in those box cars. The following day our transport was moving again. Father and I, and others read the names of the stations we passed, not recognizing any of the names. The train stopped at a station called Kaufering, then moved slowly to another open area, a field without a name. We were ordered to jump out very fast, as the guards with big German shepherd dogs, kept shouting '*Ruass Schnell, Rauss Schnell'* (Jump out fast)."

They were marched in military formation to a sub-camp of Dachau named Hurlach, officially designated as Kaufering IV. Hurlach was a slave labor camp, and for the next seven

months, they slaved away in a gravel pit 30 meters below ground. Bernie and father extracted gravel for the purposes of mixing sand and cement to construct a building known as Weingut II, which was hidden in the forest. It would eventually become a factory used to produce jet airplanes.

Bernie and his father were finally liberated by the United States 12th Armored Division on April 27, 1945. At that time, Bernie weighed 55 pounds and had typhoid fever. Bernie was moved to St. Ottilien Lacaret, a monastery, to recuperate. St. Ottilien was made up of Franciscan monks and Polish nurses who cared for wounded German soldiers.

When Bernie was strong, he started attending school. After missing 5 ½ years of school, "catching up" took him 2 years at 10 hours a day, six days a week. At same time Bernie took college courses in electrical engineering. He also applied as a stateless person for a visa to move to the United States. In 1947, Bernie came to the United States, where he re-started high school. This ultimately took 14 months. He volunteered for the US Army, went back to Germany where he served as a translator. His stint in the Army also took him to Japan and Korea. He graduated from Finley Engineering College in Kansas City, Missouri as an Electrical-Nuclear Engineer. He married his high school sweetheart Eleanor Cohen, and had two daughters and four grandchildren, all residing in California.

After a long delay, Bernie finally achieved a long life ambitious goal of becoming a Bar Mitzvah at the age of 79. Bernie is very active in community service, presenting the Holocaust from a personal perspective to high schools, middle schools, universities and adult groups all over the world.

Life is too short to waste. Every opportunity comes and goes, but you have to take risks that come to you. Bernie did just that, and this is why he and his father survived the Holocaust.

Assemblymember Jared Huffman
District 6

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Jack Illes	*Interviewed by Ashley Brady*
Wilfred "Bill" Kay	*Interviewed by Kai Hseuh*
Henry Libicki	*Interviewed by Redmond Li and David Yu*

Acknowledgements

Lorraine Harris
Volunteer Coordinator for Youth and Seniors at Home
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties

Jack Illes

By Ashley Brady

"Anyone can give up, it's the easiest thing in the world to do. But to hold it together when everyone else would understand if you fell apart, that's true strength." ~Unknown

Jack Illes is an 84 year old Holocaust survivor. His parents divorced when he was 5 years old and he lived with his father in Budapest. His father remarried and had three kids. His mother and two sisters lived in Gyöngyös and later died in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Anti-Semitism was heavily prevalent in Hungary, even before the war started. The country cooperated with Germany during World War II, and by 1944, almost all non-Jewish Hungarians had joined in the persecution of the Jewish people.

In Budapest, the Jewish people were forced to wear the yellow Star of David. They were treated poorly and the men were required to do forced labor, primarily to repair railroad damage from bombs. These men were organized into work brigades of 200 laborers each. Jack's father was forced into the bridge in 1943.

In April of 1944, Jack and all Jewish boys born in 1926 and1927 were lined up outside their homes and taken away to serve on work brigades. They were based in the city of Kiskunhalas. The work they did was predominantly repairing buildings and tracks, which had been bombed.

At one point as Jack approached a burning cattle car, he saw an older man throwing sacks of flour out of the flames. As he peered closer, he recognized this man as his father. The guard who was supervising Jack was a vicious man, but took pity on Jack and allowed him to go to his father. They embraced in tears; Jack hadn't seen his father since he was taken in 1943. Jack and his father were stationed on the same project for about 3 weeks, but in separate brigades. When they left the project, his father's brigade marched towards Russia and Jack never saw his father or anyone from that brigade again.

On October 11, 1944, Jack heard shooting and he and his friend Leslie ran for their lives. They watched from 300 feet as Hungarians and Germans shot and killed 200 of their fellow workers in cold blood. Jack and Leslie managed to escape and hide in a nearby attic. The only thing in the attic was sand that was used to put out fires from the bombs. Jack was extremely cold because he had nothing with him but the clothes on his back. Leslie, being more rotund than Jack, wasn't as cold.

After two days, the boys left the attic and started walking towards what they thought was Budapest. They were wrong – they were turned in Russia, and they were captured. The Hungarians gave them to the Germans, who took them to Shattendorf, where they were forced to dig ditches to prevent Russian tanks from passage. The work was physically strenuous and the weather was unbearably cold. Jack knew that stopping to rest would cost him his life. Leslie sat down to rest, ignoring Jack's advice. He ultimately froze to death.

Jack was taken to Mauthausen Labor Camp, one of the biggest camps that had chimneys burning around the clock. Jack did not know they were burning people. He was warned by older prisoners not to go to the infirmary because people did not return from there. The conditions were terrible, and Jack spent his days lying in the barracks with others stuffed like sardines in a can. He was then forced to walk 30 miles to Gunczkirchen. Along the way many died or were killed. If a prisoner fell down or stopped walking, he was shot. Jack stayed in Gunczkirchen until May 5, 1945, when he and the rest of the prisoners were liberated.

At that point, most of the prisoners were dying of starvation. The Americans left cans with pork buried in lard inside for the prisoners but warned them not to eat them, to wait for bread. The food was impossible for those suffering from starvation to resist and many went ahead and ate the food. They encountered gastrointestinal problems and many died from eating too much too quickly. Jack ate some of the pork in lard and became sick with diarrhea.

Jack was saved by four young Americans about his age that found him lying sick in a ditch along the road. They gave him a pill for the sickness and took him to the town of Wells where he slowly recuperated in a hospital after many months.

After the war, one of the older Hungarians who had survived and witnessed the October 11, 1944 shootings became the chief of police for the town of Kiskunhalas, and ten of the Hungarians who participated in the slayings were prosecuted. Jack was called to be a primary witness for the trial. (The police chief, Emil Ostreicher, was one of only three or four adult survivors from the war. He was also Jack's doctor.) It was extremely difficult for Jack to look into the eyes of the parents who had lost their children to the shootings. He felt that they looked at him as though he was guilty and had done something wrong. Why had he survived?

The trial lasted for six months and ended with guilty sentences for the ten men; four of whom were hanged and six were sent to prison. The stress of the trial left Jack, who was 18 at the time, with extreme stress and nervousness; he could not stop "shaking like a leaf." He was taken to a sanatorium for another month to recover from the trauma he had experienced.

After the war and the trial, the persecution of the Jewish people by the Hungarians continued. By 1956, Jack was married and had two small children when he saw a truckload of young boys with guns driving through town looking for Jews to kill. At that moment Jack decided it was not safe for his family to stay in Hungary, and he made plans to escape to Austria. During this time, many other Jewish people made the same choice—200,000 others left the country.

Jack and his family traveled with a group of about 200 others. A co-worker truck driver took Jack and his family to the Austrian border where they proceeded to walk eight miles in high snow. Jack walked with one child on his back and the other in his arms, while his wife tried to bring two bags but had to leave them behind. As they traveled, the Russians were shooting flares to light the sky to try to find those who were escaping. They frequently had to lie down in the snow and stop their journey so that they were not discovered and captured. There were mines everywhere along the way and they were fortunate enough to meet a farmer who walked with

them halfway, pointing out every mine and how to avoid it. Everyone chipped in to pay the farmer for his kindness.

U.S. Vice President Nixon came to the refugee camps and took hundreds back to the United States in planes that could carry 300 people per plane. Jack and his wife came to New York with their 5-year old son and 1-year old daughter. They stayed with Jack's uncle who was a butcher and Jack worked in the butcher shop for a while. He didn't enjoy this work and moved on to the restaurant industry.

He took a job as a busboy in a private Jewish club, Harmony, next door to Copacabana - but in order to be successful he needed to learn English. He and his wife found New York to be too big and too dirty, so they moved to Brooklyn where he attended night school to learn English. Once his English was proficient, he was promoted to waiter and then eventually became a Maitre'D at various prestigious establishments over the years. Jack continued his long and successful career working in private clubs and hotels, primarily in Florida, for many years.

Jack's life improved and he was able to care for his family and send his children to Miami University and Ohio State. His children later settled in California, one after the other, and Jack eventually followed them to California in 2001 to spend his senior years close to his family.

Today Jack is living in San Rafael and spends time with his children and grandchildren who live nearby. He was generous to share his experiences in and after World War II to those of us who will read his story. Jack Illes is a very open and loving person who should never be forgotten.

Wilfred "Bill" Kay

By Kai Hseuh

An Unforgettable Journey of Life and Death

Bill anticipated the 1st of September, 1939, because it was the first day of school for him as a fourth grader. However, after arriving at the school, he was shocked because the school was shut down. Later that day, his community was informed about the German invasion. All of them knew about Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, but they never thought they would come after them. Bill never thought that one day his freedom would be taken away because of a madman. This is Wilfred "Bill" Kay's story.

Bill lived in a Jewish community in a town called Pultusk. His life in Pultusk was wonderful. He loved to celebrate Shabbat with his siblings and parents because they would stay home, play games, and have meals together. His family and friends called him Shlomo Katz. He had six siblings, Benjamin, Rachel, Lea, Sima, Shymon, and Sholom. Bill's mother stayed home and took care of him and his siblings. His father was a teacher and a principal at the local Jewish trade school. Bill got along with all his friends, whether they were Jewish or Polish. However, sometimes there was hostility from the Polish boys toward the Jewish boys.

Bill really liked the living and learning environment in Pultusk, but everything changed when the Germans invaded. Everyone began to pack up their belongings and leave Pultusk in order to escape the German advance. Bill's family could not bring much with them because they knew the walk toWyszkow was not going to be easy. Therefore, they only brought clothing with them.

It took the family less than one day to walk to Wyszkow. However, they had to throw away some clothes on the road because Bill's parents had to carry the two youngest siblings. When the family finally reached Wyszkow, they were devastated when they saw the town on fire. As they entered the town, Bill noticed that many families were still living there. Bill's parents brought him and his siblings to a synagogue and told them that they will be staying here for the night because the bridge they needed to use to cross the river was destroyed.

Bill's father's alarming voice woke the family up. He told them the synagogue was on fire and that they must leave. The family grabbed their belongings and left the building in haste. Little did they know that a German soldier was waiting outside of the synagogue. The German soldier raised his pistol, pointed it at them as soon as they walked out, and led the family to an assembly that was being held in the town. At the assembly, the Germans marched everyone into the countryside and away from the burning town. When they arrived at a farm, the Germans began to separate the men, women, and children. The men were led to a barn, and the women and children stayed in the yard that night.

The next morning, they received word that the men were all gone. The Germans calmed the crowd by telling them that the men had been taken to Pultusk to work. Later that day, the Germans told them that they were free to walk back to Pultusk. Bill's family was happy when the

Germans allowed them to walk back to Pultusk, because they thought their father must be there waiting for them to return.

Bill's father was nowhere to be found in Pultusk. He was not in the house and everything in the house was the same as the family left a few days ago. The family began to worry. Bill's mother went out and began to question the Germans. She went to the German Military Headquarters many times to ask for answers. The Germans finally got tired of her and she was thrown out of the office. Her friends came over to her and convinced her not to go anymore because she might get into trouble. Later that day, a man who was able to escape the group of men during the night returned to Pultusk. He told Bill's mother and the other women that all the men had been shot and buried in a mass grave. Bill was traumatized when he heard about the death of his father because he never even had the chance to hug him or say good bye.

Three weeks later, a German officer came to the family's apartment and drove them out. Everyone was assembled in the city park. The Germans began to lead people into a small house one-by-one, where people were forced to give up all their money and valuable items to the Germans. When the process was over, the Germans lined everyone up. An officer came up to Bill's mother and saw that she had a gold wedding ring on her finger; he ordered her to hand over the ring. Bills mother knew that if she resisted, she would be shot on sight, so she reluctantly gave her ring to the officer. Bill could tell that her mother was crying because that ring was the last thing she had from his father. When the assembly was over, the Jews were expelled from the town.

Leaving everything behind, Bill and his family crossed the Narew River as ordered and followed a long road that never seemed to end. However, the need for survival gave the family the hope and strength to continue walking. On the road, they were told that the Jews living in Russian-occupied Poland were being treated better than the Jews that have been exiled or captured by the Germans. Bill and his family did not stop until they were able to find a farm with owners willing to risk their lives to let the Katz family stay for the night.

With the German army in pursuit, Bill knew that his family had to continue to travel east. Therefore, the family left the farm house and began to walk in that direction. They had to find a new farm every night. This routine repeated for about three to four weeks until they finally came to the river that separated Russian-occupied Poland and German-occupied Poland. Thankfully, Bill's mother was able to convince two farmers to ferry the family over the river. However, when the family reached the shore, a Russian soldier came to them riding on a horse and told them to go back because the border was closed and no one was allowed to pass.

The Russian soldier called back the two farmers and they ferried the family back into the German-occupied Poland. Just when Bill's mother was about to give up hope, she was told that there was another border crossing that was still open. She took the family with her and began to walk toward the open border. Following the railroad tracks, the family spent the whole night walking. There was only one thing on their mind, and that was to survive.

When the family arrived at the outpost, they were told that the border was closed because the Russians believed that there were German spies among the Jews. Bill's mother walked up to

the guards and began to reason with them. She tried to convince the guards to let the family go through the gate; however, the guards rejected her request. When the second group of guards came to the outpost, Bill's mother tried again to convince them, and they agreed to help her during the night because they could not be seen by anyone.

The family felt a sense of relief when they were escorted into Russian-occupied Poland because they felt safe and that their lives weren't threatened by the Germans anymore. The family continued to walk down the road in search of a house to stay. They came up to a farm that was half a mile from the outpost. "The owners were very nice," said Bill, "They fed us meals and gave us a nice room to stay overnight."

The family took off again the next morning. Bill's mother wanted to continue east to find a permanent place to live. The family boarded a freight train that headed east toward a town called Lyachovici.

While walking in the streets of Lyachovici, Bill's mother decided to go to the Russian authority and asked for help. The Russian authority gave the family a small room to stay at a farm. Bill's mother also found a job at a produce warehouse in order to support the family. However, Bill's mother soon became ill. Again, she decided to go to the Russian authority to ask for help. The authority wasn't able to offer her any help besides suggesting that she give up her children to the orphanage.

At first, Bill's mother was furious and resisted giving up her children. But as her illness worsened, she decided that maybe it was better for her children to live somewhere else with people who could care of them. Therefore, she sent two of the youngest children to separate orphanages. Later, one of Bill's older brothers, who was thirteen, decided to go to a technical school, so his mother wouldn't have to take care of so many children. Soon after that, Bill and two of his younger sisters were also sent away to an orphanage.

According to Bill, life in the orphanage wasn't too bad. During the summer of 1941, the orphanage that Bill stayed at decided to select two students to go to a summer camp. Bill was honored to be chosen to go. In June of 1941, Bill was sent to a summer camp called Naroch.

On June 22, the children in the camp were informed about the German invasion into the territory of the Soviet Union. The camp authorities convinced the Russian military to take the children away from the camp, on a freight train to Russia. While the train was leaving the station, a German fighter plane flew down and began to fire at the freight train. Luckily, the bullets from the fighter didn't cause any damage to the train. The ride to Russia was long. Some children got off the train because they were close to their home; the remainder went to Mordovia. Soon after the arrival of these children, an orphanage was created for them. This was Bill's new home.

When Bill turned fourteen, he was sent to work in a factory that was part of the railroad industry. However, due to the horrible working conditions, Bill decided to leave the factory. Later, Bill was sent to another factory where he learned how to make transformers. During the two years working at the factory, Bill was able to learn new building and engineering skills.

The war finally ended in May 1945. Bill asked permission from the authorities to search for his family in Lyachovici. The authorities agreed and granted him a 30 day vacation. When Bill traveled back to Lyachovici, he was able to find the landlady that was there when his mother sent him away to orphanage. The landlady told Bill about the fate of all the Jews in town. She told him that the Jews were rounded up, killed, and buried in a mass grave. The landlady also mentioned that two of his siblings came back to his mother, but she didn't know anything about them; therefore, she could not give Bill their names.

Bill stayed at the farm for two weeks. When it was time for Bill to go back to the factory, the landlady introduced him to a Jewish man who survived by hiding when the Germans came. The survivor told Bill that the Jews were put into a ghetto and one day they were all led out of the town, killed, and buried in a mass grave. However, Bill wasn't able to go look for the mass grave because the survivor didn't want to go and there was also no sign of it anywhere in the field.

The survivor invited Bill to travel with him and his family back to Poland. Bill couldn't go back because he didn't have the documents that were needed to prove that he was from Poland. Therefore, the survivor added Bill to his family, so they could travel back to Poland together.

When Bill reached Poland, there was nothing there: no family, no friends, and no home. Bill, along with the survivors, left for American-occupied Germany to seek refuge. They heard the refugee camp provided safety and food, and could also help them to immigrate to another country. When they arrived at the temporary refugee camp in Germany, Bill decided to go to America and to start a new life, but it took four years to make this desire a reality.

Bill arrived in Oakland, California in September, 1949. He was surprised because there were so many different varieties of foods. For Bill, America was like paradise. However, his life in America didn't start out great. Bill couldn't speak or understand English, and he had to study English in night school while working as a clerk in a store. Thankfully, the Jewish Community Federation was able to help Bill find a place to live.

After hearing Bill's story, I was surprised at how lucky Bill was to escape, and how hard his family tried to survive. The lessons that were taught to me through Bill's story are priceless. He has taught me to try harder, believe in myself, and never give up. Even now, Bill hasn't given up the search for his two unaccounted siblings. I will tell his story to everyone I know and I hope they will learn from this story and be thankful for everything their parents had given them.

Henry Libicki

By Redmond Li and David Yu

Working to Live

On Bloody Monday in September 1939, the Germans opened fire on hundreds of Jews in Czestochowa. This was not the end of the terrorism that the Jews faced. On December 25th, the Great Synagogue was set on fire. Unfortunately, even after these horrifying events, terror was continuously inflicted upon the Jews. These events are part of the story of Henry Libicki.

Henry was born in a little town in Poland called Klobuck. He had a comfortable life which Henry described as "normal", even though there was discrimination against Jews. There were different schools for Jews and the Poles, so Henry only had friends that were Jewish. He lived in Klobuck until the age of 9, when his family moved to Czestochowa.

On the Sunday before Bloody Monday, the Germans came into town. They were very friendly; talking to the locals and going into peoples' houses for a drink of water. The next day was horrid; the Germans began what they came to do. They forced the Jews into groups, with their guns pointed at them. They chased and shot people as they passed by. The Jews were made to stand in the street with their hands in the air, and then separated into two groups by gender. The groups were searched for any object that could be used as a weapon, like sharp objects. If they were found with one, they would be sent to a pit where they were killed.

The town was converted into a ghetto. Henry's family lived in an apartment with three rooms and one kitchen. Now, they had to give up two rooms to share with other families. Henry's family was luckier than most because they owned a bakery. Therefore, food was not as big of a problem for them as it was for others. This did not mean life was easy for Henry – every day was a struggle to live. They lived in fear of dying the next day. They never knew if the Germans would suddenly decide to kill half the population.

In the fall of 1941, their fear became reality. Rumors went around that the Germans were going to hold a "Selection." This meant that they would gather everyone up and select people to be killed or to be saved. The people chosen to be killed were sent to gas chambers in another town. Fortunately for Henry, the Germans spared the bakers. After the Selection, only five percent of the population remained in Czestochowa. They were put to work.

Months later, the approximately 2000 remaining prisoners were sent to a labor camp called Hasag-Pelcery. Before the remaining prisoners were moved there, there was a small uprising. Two Jewish men had acquired revolvers and tried to kill some Germans and escape. The Germans killed them and 25 others to stop others from thinking of starting more uprisings. One of the 25 people killed was Henry's brother-in-law.

When the prisoners arrived at Hasag-Pelcery, the German Vice President greeted the prisoners with the statement "You live as long as you work". This slogan became imprinted into Henry's mind. He started working 12-hour shifts every day except Sunday, which was a half day

work. Henry worked as a mechanic. He woke up before 7:00 in the morning and was given a piece of bread along with some coffee made of burnt oats. At noon, he was given soup which was basically flavored water. At 7:00 in the evening, he was finally able to stop working and go back to the barracks to rest for the next day's work.

Henry continued working like this until January of 1945. It was then that he heard rumors the Germans were leaving the camp. He could not believe it. Henry walked out into the cold to see it for himself, and it was true. Henry was finally free from the Germans. He could do whatever he wanted to now. Henry and other curious members of Hasag-Pelcery walked into the German's residential area. He entered one of the deserted houses and walked into the kitchen, where he found a bag of sugar. Henry began eating by the handfuls. The nightmare was over.

Henry's father acquired fake passports and moved his family to Germany. Five years later, Henry moved to America.

Those six years of hardship and terror have had a lasting effect on Henry. In America, Henry was uncomfortable when he saw uniformed police officers, but he adjusted to this after a while. Some things will never be erased from his mind, however. Although Henry still has nightmares about the Holocaust, he has also become a stronger person as a result of it.

Assemblymember Dave Jones
District 9

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Liz Igra *Interviewed by Jordan Feri*

Acknowledgements

Chani Oppenheim, Executive Director
UC Davis Hillel
Davis, CA

Christiana Dominguez, Advisor
YMCA Youth and Government Program
Sacramento, CA

Liz Igra

By Jordan Feri

A Loss of Innocence

For many, the Holocaust brought forth an end to normalcy. For many more, the Holocaust was Hell. For Liz Igra, a Holocaust survivor, Germany's invasion of Poland in September of 1939, when she was 4 years old, was nothing more than a normal day. Ms. Igra was born in Krakow, and lived there for the first three years of her life. In 1939, her family moved to Tarnopol, and during the invasion she witnessed the bombing of a nearby church. In 1939, Liz's family, who had fled from the German-occupied western Poland, came to seek refuge in the Russian occupied Tarnopol. At that time her aunt, uncle, and their little daughter came and stayed with Liz's family. In 1940, her father was transferred to a hospital in the city of Czortkow, the little cousin, aunt, and uncle moved in with them. Life under Russian occupation was almost normal, but distinct changes began to emerge with the German occupation of eastern Poland.

Very soon after the Germans occupied Czortkow, a German soldier came to Ms. Igra's home with apologies that her uncle would not be coming home, as he was urgently needed for the war effort. She has since found out that many people, including her little cousin's father, were taken away and shot in the Black Forest.

To make matters worse, a German officer requisitioned half of their house. In the young child's mind, however, this all seemed normal. The house was divided in two, with the officer on one side and Liz and her family on the other. When all of the Jews in the town were required to wear a star or an armband, Ms. Igra saw it not as a form of profiling or a sign of the impending war, but rather a privilege. What child wouldn't want to wear a bright star on their clothes? It was not until Liz and her family were moved to the city ghetto that she finally began to understand her family's predicament.

It was April 1942, Ms. Igra's family was forced to vacate their home in favor of a small apartment in the Czortkow ghetto. Although Liz had lost the space that her previous home had provided, as well as amenities such as ample food and a working sewage system, she was still content with the ability to roam freely outside of her home and play with her beloved doll, buggy, and scooter. As time went on, the citizens of the ghetto began to hear rumors that only those people who were unemployed would be "relocated." In response, Ms. Igra's father quickly set up a makeshift hospital within the confines of the ghetto to provide medical care as well as jobs to the Jews within. He attempted to create these jobs so that many of the people of the ghetto would have a work card, which they were lead to believe would save them from being deported.

Unfortunately, the end of one crisis brought another. Commandant Kolner, the supposed protector of the Jews, informed Liz's father that soon all women and children of the ghetto would be "resettled." Terrified of the fate that his wife and child might suffer, in August 1942,

Ms. Igra's father quickly sent Liz and her mother to a nearby country hospital to hide. Ms. Igra never saw her father again.

Concerned with the well-being of the people in the ghetto, especially those in the hospital, Liz's father decided to stay behind for one more day. That night, several thousand people were deported to Belzec, an extermination camp. It was only until years later that Ms. Igra learned that Belzec was a camp designed only for killing. It saw the deaths of over 600,000 Jews in 9 months of its existence.

At the camp, Jews were taken out of their respective cattle trucks and made to think that they were merely stopping over before going to a labor camp. They were even given tokens for their luggage. They were escorted down long walkways and taken into shower buildings, where they were to be "disinfected." As Ms. Igra put it, "They were deceived until the last minute." It was only at the very end of their lives that these thousands of Jewish men, women, and children knew the extent of the Nazis' evil.

Meanwhile, Ms. Igra and her mother were brought back to the ghetto by Commandant Kolner, who knew of their whereabouts the entire time. They had to move out of their apartment and into a very crowded home full of strangers. Fortunately, Ms. Igra still had her cousin to play with. For a few weeks, Liz was oblivious to her deteriorating situation, but missed her father terribly. In October, this all ended when a Jeep came down the street of the ghetto. Ms. Igra remembers hearing, "All out!" being shouted in German, and joining a huge crowd as she held her mother's hand. Eventually, the crowd stopped its march. Then, as her mother held her close and hid her inside her raincoat, Liz heard shouting, crying, gunshots…and cheering. All around her, the puddles of rain began to turn red. After that day, she never saw her aunt or little cousin again.

"I think it was at that moment…that I stopped being a child," said Ms. Igra. Finally, she too had become aware of the Nazi's evil.

Over the next few years, Ms. Igra and her mother experienced deceit, hate, depravity, and danger at the hands of Nazis and non-Nazis alike. Shortly after the massacre, which Liz and her mother miraculously survived, Liz's nanny, who became a housekeeper in their old home now occupied by the Nazi officer, overheard talk of the ghetto being liquidated.

She proceeded to bribe some guards, and quickly spirited Liz and her mother away. She hid them in a small room in the servants' quarter. After procuring false identity papers, Ms. Igra and her mother went to Krakow, her birthplace, and hid in an apartment that was provided for them by a friend of Liz's uncle. Only days after they moved in, however, the Gestapo came to arrest them. They had been set up.

Because Ms. Igra's mother did not look Jewish, they escaped from German control into the cold streets of Krakow. After obtaining another set of fake papers from a friend of her uncle, Ms. Igra and her mother attempted to make a new life for themselves. Her mother got a job at the post office, but was forced to flee when someone threatened to reveal her identity as a Jewish woman. Once again, mother and daughter were on the run.

This time, they made their way across the Carpatian Mountains, through Czechoslovakia to Hungary, which had not yet been occupied by Germany. The two walked mostly at night and slept during the day in order to escape German & Ukrainian patrols, which utilized German shepherds to sniff out hiding refugees. They ate sugar cubes and "medical drops." Liz got chicken pox. Fearing that her daughter would die, Ms. Igra's mother took her a forester's cabin. He connected them with a family of refugees who were on their way to Hungary as well.

When the group finally reached Hungary, they were told by their guide to set their watches for 6:00, when it would be safe to cross. They did so, but were met with the border police as they tried to cross. They had again been betrayed.

For the food-deprived Liz, the jail that she and her mother were taken to was more of a gift than a punishment. There, she was provided with warm soup, showers, and a cot. Eventually, Liz and her mother were moved to another prison in Budapest. It was 1943, and Ms. Igra spent the entire summer in prison.

When they were released, they located a place where there were beds for women and children to sleep. Eventually, Liz's mother was able to hide in the nurse's quarters of a hospital, while Liz was admitted into the children's ward. There, Ms. Igra contracted scarlet fever, and was placed in an isolation ward with other Hungarian children. It took months for Liz to recover, in which time she almost forgot Polish and became fluent in Hungarian. In 1944, Hungary had finally been occupied by Germany, and Liz and her mother went into hiding. They survived street battles, bombings, and starvation in the outskirts of Budapest.

With the war over in 1945, Ms. Igra and her mother returned to her birthplace in Krakow, where they were reunited with Liz's uncle. The three of them then made their way to France. Ms. Igra spent the remainder of her childhood, first in an orphanage, and then in a hotel apartment in Paris, where she experienced her lifelong dream of going to school. Unable to stay permanently in the city, the only three remaining members of Ms. Igra's family eventually moved to Australia, where Liz attended high school.

Ms. Igra now lives with her husband in Sacramento, California. She is a retired teacher, and has 6 children and 6 grandchildren. She has started an organization called the Central Valley Holocaust Educators' Network, which aims to "[support] teachers in effectively implementing a Holocaust curriculum that meets California Social Studies and Language Arts Standards."

While Ms. Igra may have lost her childhood, and with it her innocence, to the Holocaust, she has gained a great deal of insight from her terrible ordeal. She believes that "the lessons of the Holocaust can teach us about ourselves; our strengths, our weaknesses, and our roles as members of a civil society."

Assemblymember Ted Lieu

District 53

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Steven Kovary *Interviewed by Duncan Conley*

Steven Kovary

By Duncan Conley

Intolerance of Intolerance: How the Horrors of the Holocaust Affected One Man's Beliefs

To many, the Holocaust is nothing more than another distant historical event they read about in their high school history textbooks. To many, the millions of Jews who starved, suffered, and were systematically murdered at the hands of Nazi Germany are nothing more than the numbers and statistics they read on a museum plaque. To Steven Kovary, however, the Holocaust is much, much more. Born on December 31, 1941 in Budapest, Hungary, Kovary was brought into a world where the population lived in constant fear of being deported to forced labor camps, and the Nazi persecution of his people, the Jews, was steadily intensifying. Both of his grandparents went into hiding in fear of violence and deportation. Shortly after Kovary's birth, his father, the head of a small shoe manufacturing business, was sent to a forced labor camp. He returned home just a few months later, but this asylum was only temporary; in June 1944, Nazis rounded up Kovary and both of his parents for deportation to another labor camp. However, as the Nazis marched them out of Budapest, Kovari's parents managed to deposit him at one of the Jewish safe houses in Budapest established by Swiss diplomat Carl Lutz and Swedish humanitarian Raoul Wallenberg. These safe houses offered some measure of protection from Nazi animosity for Jewish children, but Kovari, not able to comprehend why his parents were abandoning him in such a way, was devastated. He was three and a half years old.

Life in the safe house was for the most part miserable. "I don't remember much," Kovary said, when I asked him to describe his conditions in the refuge. "All I can tell you is I was always hungry… and I was always cold." He was also in a constant state of fear—Nazi soldiers staged periodic raids on the safe house as Hitler's anti-Semitic policies tightened around Hungary. The soldiers would haul children off by the dozens. These children were never to be seen or heard from again. Conditions deteriorated even further as the Russian counter-offensive against Nazi-controlled Hungary drew closer to Budapest; Nazis became increasingly barbaric and aggressive towards Jews, and Kovary remembers that the periodic raids on his safe house became more frequent and more violent. "I was always afraid that I would be taken," Kovari recalled. The only refrain from these harsh realities that Kovary was able to enjoy was when his Hungarian caretaker, Piroshka, would play piano for him and the other children. However, other than the small comfort of music, life in the safe house continued to worsen for Kovary. He heard nothing from his parents and grandparents, and grew increasingly lonely and hopeless. His grandfather was finally able to make contact with him in March 1945, a couple of days before the Russian army wrested control of Budapest's ghetto area from Nazi control. He came out of hiding to find Kovary, and went from safe house to safe house searching for him. When his grandfather finally found him, he was overwhelmed with emotion. It had been nearly a year since he had seen or heard from anyone from his family. "I remember the tears," recalls Kovary. "I begged him to take me home … I was crying my eyes out. I don't know if it was from happiness or from fear of being abandoned again."

Kovary was abandoned again, but not for long. Two days later, his grandfather judged it was safe enough to take him into hiding. He returned to the safe house, collected Kovary, and

brought him to the cellar that he and his wife had been hiding in for the past year. As the Nazis and the Russians battled for Budapest above, Kovary and his parents took refuge behind piles of wood and coal. Finally, the din of the battle died down, and a little later, the family heard Russian voices speaking directly above them; they judged it was safe to come out of their hiding spot. However, when they tried to open the iron grating that covered the entrance of the cellar, it was strangely difficult to open it. After much effort, Kovary and his grandparents were able to wedge the entrance open wide enough for Kovary to fit through. "The first thing I saw was a lineup of Russian soldiers in white camouflage," Kovary recalled. "Then I said 'Ruskie!', and they looked at me, and one of them started laughing… but at the same time I realized why we couldn't open the gate… the Russians had made a pile of German corpses in front of it." Though the Nazi reign of terror was finally over, Kovary was deeply traumatized by this incident. To this day, he cannot stand the sight of blood.

Though the holocaust may have come to an end, Kovary's ordeal was far from over. "The hunger was maybe not quite as acute," remembers Kovary, but other than that, conditions hardly improved. Hunger was still a problem, and Kovary was frequently forced to chase Russian vehicles down the streets of Budapest along with hoards of other hungry residents as the Russians tossed them meager portions of bread. The Holocaust also took an irreparable emotional toll on Kovary that was not revealed until after his mother escaped from labor camp and returned home, shortly after the Russians secured Budapest. At first, Kovary did not recognize her; she was completely emaciated, and it had been nearly a year since he had last seen her. After this initial phase of denial, Kovary became resentful of her for abandoning him. "They had no choice [but to abandon me]," said Kovary, "and they did the best they could do, and they saved my life, but of course, how can you appreciate that when you're four years old?" Kovary never fully bonded with his mother again because of this irrational resentment, a fact which he deeply regrets. When his father returned home two weeks after his mother, Kovary harbored similar grudges against him. The ordeal and trauma his separation from his parents would leave an indelible mark on Kovary's psyche; he was never been able to build a close relationship with either of his parents. Furthermore, Kovary developed a phobia of separation that he wouldn't overcome until much later in his life.

Meanwhile, conditions under Communist Russian rule quickly began to deteriorate. The Russians made no effort to restore Budapest's bombed-out infrastructure, and housing became a huge problem. Russians began rounding people up indiscriminately and sending them off to labor camps in Siberia, where many were worked to death. Kovari recalls that many of his family friends, including Jews returning from concentration camps, were sent to such fates. His father was reduced to a state of perpetual fear of being deported until 1948, when Russian control stabilized to some extent. However, even then, Jews were still violently oppressed; Stalin's puppet government in Budapest was by coincidence almost entirely Jewish, and thus attempted to prove their loyalty to Stalin by bearing down on their own people.

In 1951, Kovary discovered his passion for swimming. He split his time between swimming and water polo, and excelled at both, despite his childhood malnutrition. Swimming became one of the biggest drives and focuses in his life. This pursuit was interrupted, however, by the 1956 Hungarian Revolution against its Russian occupiers. Kovary, equally as weary of Russian rule as anyone, joined the effort by carrying ammunition for revolutionary troops on the

frontline, but was turned off of such activity when he witnessed group of revolutionaries executing a group of Russian police who were trying to surrender. “Probably some of the same trash who were Nazis during the war took it upon themselves to kill everyone who came out of the building,” Kovari remarked. “I was shocked. I thought it was butchery.” Disillusioned and disgusted, Kovari returned home to a furious father, who was incredulous at the fact that Kovary would expose the family by engaging in revolutionary activity. That was the final straw. Feeling unwanted by his parents and used by the revolution, Kovary told his parents that he was leaving Hungary. After some heated discussion, his parents gave him some money and sent him on his way. He was fifteen years old.

He and two local friends, Frank and Alias, set out for the Austrian-Hungarian border the same week. They asked a local farmer to guide them to the border, and he obliged, leading them on the first part of their journey. In constant fear of minefields and being spotted by Russian border guards (at one point, they were fired upon by such a guard), they eventually crossed the border into Austria. The trio split up to go their separate ways, and after being shuffled through various Austrian towns and refugee camps, Kovary found himself on a plane to Nulles Air Force Base in New Jersey. He tried to settle in New York City with an aunt and uncle, but felt completely out of place; he just wanted to go somewhere to swim. Finally, a family in Santa Monica, California agreed to take him in. He pursued both his swimming career and an education at UCLA and Cal State Long Beach. In 1997, he was invited to the Maccabiah games in Israel to compete in the master’s division swimming events, where he won six gold and two silver medals. He now resides in Torrance, California, and works in Palos Verdes Estates as a CPA, and is a proud father and grandfather.

So what does the Holocaust mean? Can anything be learned from it, so that nothing so horrendous will ever occur again? Kovary’s answer: tolerance. When I asked him how I think his experiences in the Holocaust affected his beliefs, he responded, “I have always taken the side of the underdog… the downtrodden always have a spot in my heart.” He even went as far as to say that his experiences have given him an extreme “intolerance of intolerance”, and that he cannot stand to see people be oppressed in any way. However, what the Holocaust has taken from Mr. Kovari far outweighs anything it has given. He may not have been old enough to comprehend the horrors of the Holocaust at the time, but was deeply and irreparably damaged, both psychologically and emotionally. The most notable damage was the fact that he was never able to build a normal relationship with his mother and father. “I could never forgive them, even though it wasn’t their fault. It’s really Hitler who did that,” Kovari remarked. “Its not just Auschwitz and the death camps and the crematoriums, and the six million Jews who died, but how Hitler has damaged the psyches of all the other people, who have lived through it all.”

Assemblymember Dan Logue

District 13

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Judith Kenedi *Interviewed by Josh Gilfrey*

Judith Kenedi

By Josh Gilfrey

"I did not want to give up. It was my inner-strength and will to survive that got me through the atrocities of the Holocaust." These are the powerful words spoken by Holocaust survivor Judith Kenedi. Her self-determination and unwillingness to give up is a testament to all that anything is possible. The things that Judith experienced are incomprehensible to the average person. However, it is a story that must be passed on to honor those who lost their lives and also to make sure these atrocities never happen again.

Judith grew up in Miskolc, Hungary, the second largest city in the country. She had one brother and several cousins scattered throughout the city. Her father was an art dealer and her mother was a dressmaker who also taught young girls how to make dresses. Judith was raised in a close family in the Jewish faith. She recalls attending synagogue every Saturday morning, and then meeting at her grandmother's house with all of her family. Her grandmother's house embodied to her what family was all about. It was a place where her family came together and enjoyed each other's company on the weekends and holidays. She also attended a Jewish high school.

When the war broke out, Germany originally had an agreement with Hungary that they would not invade Hungary. That changed in March 1944, when Hungary became the last country that Germany invaded. Judith's life was then changed forever. The once happy family life she enjoyed would soon take a turn for the worse. Her family was told over a loud speaker that they had to pack up all of their valuables in one suitcase and move to a ghetto. She lived with ten people in a one bedroom apartment. There, she was forced to wear the Star of David on her clothing and abide by curfew laws. During this time, her brother was also thrown into prison. He was very disturbed by this because he did not see himself as a criminal. At this time, all of the Jewish schools were shut down and Jewish students were home schooled.

As if things could not get worse, Judith and her family were packed into cattle cars and taken to Auschwitz. They were not allowed to eat, drink, or use the restroom. The cars had no windows and all they could hear were the giant German shepherds barking. When they arrived at Auschwitz they were lined up and shown to Dr. Mengele, a doctor who conducted inhumane scientific experiments on Jewish people in concentration camps. As she stood in line holding onto her mother, they were separated into two lines. Her mother was told to go to the right and Judith was told to go to the left. That was the last time Judith saw her mother. Everyone in the right line went to the gas chambers. She recalled, "Everything happened so fast. No one knew what was happening. People looked so raggedy." In the morning they were given coffee and at night, they were given soup. On Sundays, they were given a small piece of bread. Everyday was stressful because they never knew if they were going to make it alive. If you got sick you could go to the infirmary; however, that could often be a fatal decision because the Germans would often kill the people who were sick. There were no social, cultural, or religious activities. The people would tell each other stories to keep their spirits up. They would talk about what they were going to do when they got out. This small act kept some alive. She described Auschwitz as being very cold and they were only given dirty clothes and no covers for their wooden beds.

Early one morning they woke up and were told to march. They were taken to a train station where they were once again loaded into cattle cars. After a long journey where she described hearing a lot of explosions from bombs, they arrived at the border of Czechoslovakia. The Russian army then came in and told them that they were free.

After being freed she went back to her home in Hungary. To her dismay, she had nothing to come back to. Her house and community were destroyed by bombs. She stayed with her cousin until her father found her and took her to America.

The Holocaust obviously had a dramatic effect on Judith's life. She described being "numb" for several years afterwards. She did not want to even talk about what she went through. Her experiences changed her life forever and gave her a new perspective on life. As she aged, she began telling her stories to schools in California. She shares her experiences so that the world never forgets what happened. She hopes to prevent further acts of genocide. Judith has a son and daughter, and through the telling of her story, she feels like her life is now fulfilled.

Assemblymember Bonnie Lowenthal

District 54

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Marthe Cohn

Interviewed by Sarah Sax

Marthe Cohn

By Sarah Sax

Petite Yet Powerful

"You should never accept to be kept under the boot of anybody; you have to fight back." Marthe Cohn spoke with fervor and conviction. Never hesitant to resist an unjust cause, especially during the Nazi reign in World War II, she courageously risked everything and contributed to the Allies' victory. Now as a renowned author and international speaker she tells me her story, a memoir that truly impacts us all.

I was graciously invited inside her home, just as Marthe had been invited and helped by so many others. Many of these people didn't know her purpose, but those who did were determined to help her despite the consequences of risking their lives and those of their families. They didn't speak of it, but simply prayed for her survival. Marthe Cohn's harrowing mission had to succeed because, as she said, "the alternative would be death."

This petite, lively, remarkable lady has deservedly received numerous honors, awards, certificates and medals; yet she is humble and filled with great gratitude. Her story is full of love, fear, unimaginable loss, family, friendships, trust, persuasion, conviction in one's beliefs, and without question, an unbreakable will. I spent hours captivated by Marthe – with sparkling blue eyes that had seen so much in their past, and her intriguing story – I was spellbound. I can only highlight her story here. To understand the magnitude of what this amazing woman accomplished for herself, her family, and for the people fighting the Nazis, one must read Marthe Cohn's book with Wendy Holden, published in 2002 by Random House, Inc. called, *Behind Enemy Lines: A true story of a French Jewish spy in Nazi Germany*.

Marthe was born near the Germany border in Metz, France into a Jewish Orthodox family where the laws of Jewish observance were a part of her everyday life. The discipline and routine of her religion also instilled the importance of education. Marthe is a highly educated woman who fought for Jewish rights in high school and later became a registered nurse (in France in 1943; in Swizerland in 1954), then a nurse-anesthetist (graduating in 1958 as a Certified Nurse Anesthetist from Barnes Hospital, Washington University, St. Louis, MI). She practiced nursing while serving three years in the French Vietnam War and, later, specialized in anesthesia in the United States (New York, NY; Minneapolis, MN; Pittsburgh, PA; since 1979) in Los Angeles, California. Reflecting on what Marthe chose to do in life, I was pleased by the fact that her ambition was to take people out of their pain. Marthe's young life was full of the effects of anguish but she faced them with fortitude in an effort to survive.

Here, I will share her inspirational story.

In Metz, Marthe read daily the newspapers, and in 1938 she learned of Kristallnacht (the breaking of all the Jewish store fronts, synagogues, and homes and the Jewish people's spirits). The wealthier Jews made plans to leave the country. Others tried to figure out how to leave, but most had nowhere to go and no means to get there if they did. Those people perished. It was in

1940 that the German Army invaded and occupied a large part of France. Marthe and her family were refugees in Poitiers, which became part of the occupied territory. Enforcing Aryanization rules, many unethical laws were put in place degrading the Jews and preventing them from living the open and free lives they had once known.

As one of eight children, Marthe got her inner strength by looking to protect her family and formulate an escape. With the help of her nursing school classmates, her parents, 82 year old grandmother, two youngest sisters a seven year-old German cousin from Dusseldorf her family had given refuge since 1938 and she were able to escape from occupied France into non-occupied France.

Sometimes I wonder how God brings everything together in such a way to create miracles. Marthe had worked with a young man who insisted on providing her and her family with forged identity papers without the stamp indicating they were Jewish, which permitted them to escape the Nazis. The Gestapo later arrested her sister Stephanie, a medical student, and sent her to prison for helping others escape. Before she was sent to the Drancy concentration camp, she had a chance to win her release but declined because the children in the camp near Poitiers needed her care. Torn between her family and these children, Stephanie finally yielded and, with Marthe's master plan, attempted to escape. The plan failed due to the Gastapo's non-commission officer Whilhelm Hipp, and Stephanie was deported to Auschwitz on Yom Kippur of 1942. She never returned.

After graduating as a registered nurse in Marseilles in September 1943, Marthe moved to Paris to live with her oldest sister Cecile. Following the liberation of Paris in 1944, Marthe joined the French Army where she met a colonel who was impressed with her fluent German. He asked her to serve in the French Military intelligence. Marthe was willing.

Marthe was sent into Germany "behind enemy lines" to spy for France. She used endless stamina trudging through fields, mountains, night and snow to achieve her mission. Her acute acumen and intuition saved her life more than once. Sizing people up, alternating between asserting herself and acting demure as needed, telling stories that would encourage people to help her achieve her goal, Marthe gathered valuable information. Sometimes she had no idea what would happen next, but with a level head, she forged on. When her nerves immobilized her, she used patience and focus to bring her to a state where she could function intelligently.

Once over the border between Switzerland and Germany, Marthe reached the safehouse that was provided by French intelligence. She was a pleasant German woman whose husband was missing in action, and she was pleased to have the company. Marthe could relate to this woman's experience because Marthe's fiancé had been captured and executed by the Germans in 1943. The woman noticed Marthe's torn stockings and was suspicious that Marthe was a spy, having crossed the fields at the nearby border. Petite, angelic, blue-eyed, and blonde, Marthe looked herself down and up, then turned to her hostess, and with a big jovial laugh said, "Do I look like a spy?" That was enough to elude the woman. But Marthe realized she needed to carry on with her mission and soon afterwards the woman was helping Marthe board a train to Freiburg. The first piece of intelligence Marthe gathered was that the Siegfried Line near Frieburg had been completely evacuated by the German Army – an essential piece of

information for the French army. Second, Marthe discovered the exact location where the remnants of the German Army was hidden in ambush in the Black Forest. Not having had the time to code the message, these two vital bits of information were sent in a letter written, in French, to the French Army Intelligence via the Swiss Intelligence Service.

As her courier was not available for several days, Marthe decided to cross into Switzerland and hand her message to a Swiss Custom Guard. After crossing the Swiss border, she was mistakably led to a German guard post. Fortunately the guards were sleeping, and Marthe, realizing the danger, was able to flee and reach the Swiss custom officer to whom she confided the letter containing the vital information.

The receipt of this news was instrumental in the war. As a result, Marthe Cohn, known by her undercover name as Lenotre, became a decorated hero. After the war, her heroism continued as she served as a nurse on the front lines of Vietnam. She went on to meet her love and husband of 52 years, Major Cohn, M.D., Ph. D. and, in 1970, became his assistant in Neuroscience Research. The professional collaboration lasted until 1999 when Marthe retired. Marthe has two sons and is sought after to speak around the world about her experiences.

I asked Marthe, "What important messages would you like everyone to take from your story?" She said there are three things. First, one must take an active role in fighting for freedom and treating all people with dignity and respect. Second, we must never forget about the tragedy that happened almost 70 years ago, known as the Holocaust. And third, those that died (Jews non-Jews alike) must not have died in vain. We must always remember them and fight in their names for the betterment of humanity.

At the close of our talk, I asked Marthe, "What did you learn from this experience and what can people in my generation do to carry on the memory of the Holocaust?" Her response was priceless. She said she was proud to have contributed to the war effort, and we smiled broadly to one another. We are all proud of her. She also said she learned there is a strong human connection between people that goes beyond race, religion, and belief systems. It was that common thread of humanity that motivated people to risk so much to help her and her family and many other people. She said that the youth of today must not become complacent, and that we must educate ourselves to strengthen our minds. Marthe always found that her desire to give back by serving her country was important. She said some can fight, but those that can't fight can contribute in other ways to strengthen the country and make contributions to a better world.

My afternoon visit with Marthe Cohn led to a nighttime departure. Fortunately, we will see each other soon, since she has accepted my family's invitation to have Marthe and her husband join us at our Passover Seder this year. We are honored and look forward to having her.

Assemblywoman Fiona Ma
District 12

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Mary Dinits	*Interviewed by Sara Storey-Cuddeback*
Anshel Fried	*Interviewed by Benjamin Wachs*
Esther Jachimowicz	*Interviewed by Sharon Aucar*
Harry Recht	*Interviewed by Gabriel Lopez Low*
Sally Recht	*Interviewed by Ezra Stoller*
Tauba Weiss	*Interviewed by Geny Rabinovich*

Acknowledgements

Taylor Epstein, Supervisor of YouthFirst Programs
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco,
the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties
San Francisco, CA

Brian Brown
Case Manager/ Program Coordinator, Holocaust Reparations Programs
Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco,
the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties
San Francisco, CA

Mary Dinits

By Sara Storey-Cuddeback

Living in the Memories

The town of Vilna in Poland, during World War II, was once home to 14-year-old Mary, as well as 80,000 other Jews who participated in the city's booming politics, culture, and economy. As if a dream turned into a nightmare, all of the music, education, laughter, and Judaism in Vilna was all wiped away and locked into ghettos when the Nazis invaded. The city of vivacity was shut down in the ghettos established in Vilna. The vision of the River Neris and the passion of theater life all crumbled as the 80,000 people lost the happiness in their lives. Mary said that some days in the ghetto, the German police forced thousands of people outside into the streets where they were killed. After several events like this, Mary's family dispersed and only her mother and sister were living with her in the ghetto. Mary's father went outside the streets of the ghetto to see if he could find a job, and her brother left for the woods to escape the army. Ten days later though, Mary's father returned to the Vilna Ghetto where Mary was staying, and told them of the insolence going on in the city streets.

It was clear to Mary's father that their time was coming to be evaluated and possibly killed by the Germans. Nobly, he locked Mary, her sister, and mother into the small closet in their room, piled on top of each other with furniture covering the door. Knowing his family was safe, Mary's father left the ghetto and walked into the Nazi occupied streets, sacrificing his life and saving his family's. Mary knew her father had been shot. Though it was devastating knowing of his death, Mary knew she needed to step up and help her mother and younger sister make it through this nightmare. After ten days being in the closet and running out of food and water, Mary's mother broke open the door to see if she could go into the streets to get new supplies. She rushed back to her daughters, telling them that the Nazis had left the streets.

The family moved back into their previous home and tried to get back to living their old lives. There was no sign of future attacks. Sadly, the theater, opera, and flourishing education of Vilna had already disappeared, but Jews were in the streets again, working and trying make the best of the horror that had already intruded their lives by keeping up shop and sticking with family. Soon, the Nazis returned and found Mary, her mother, and younger sister hiding under the steps of their workplace, the spot they found to hide in as soon as they heard the Nazis were arriving. They were forced out and put against a wall, where 31 Jews stood in total. The trains to take them away were in sight. Vilna and all happiness seemed to disappear with the sight of the trains and killer dogs ready to pounce on anyone who refused to board. The commander from the Jewish police stepped up: "Take that girl out," he ordered, as the Nazis tracked back and forth inspecting the line. Mary was taken to the side, her mother and sister left against the wall. She did not know why she was picked by the police to not board the trains; she was the lucky one that was chosen out of the blue to be watched over, out of Nazi harm for now.

The gates opened up, and the carts to collect the Jews of Vilna rolled in. The tracks that the pick-up carts rolled in on used to bring in traded goods that added more aspects of culture to Vilna. But now Mary watched as the Jewish people loaded onto the trains. Then it was her

mother and sister's turn. Boosted up onto the cart, her mother rushed with her sister to a window, where they looked out at Mary by herself. Mary remarked, "At that moment, seeing my mom and sister looking out, I knew I had to survive and keep fighting for them. My mom saw I was saved by the policeman, she knew I was going to be alright." The trains left. Mary asked the policeman what was going to happen to her sister and mother. "Sorry, they have already been killed by machine guns," was the response.

Mary was alone. Relying on people she didn't know to help shelter her and give her work. Time slowly passed, and on September 18, 1943, Mary was ordered by the Nazis to be sent to Latvia to work in a camp called Kaiserwald. At this point, 75,000 of the 80,000 Jews in Vilna were already killed. At Kaiserwald, Mary worked on military supplies and slept in bunk beds with no pillows and too little room for the amount of people sharing the bed. Here, Mary's hair was shaved off. She was humiliated, along with the other women in the camp. A German officer told her, "You are a dummy for crying about this. If you are alive, your hair will grow, if you die, you don't need your hair." For six months Mary worked in Latvia, then was moved to Shtudhoff where conditions were worse. There were no cramped bunk beds; people had to stand up in a row and sleep leaning on those behind them. Water was splashed on those who screamed during the nights. Describing the Shtudhoff camp, Mary said, "You saw people as not real people. These people were woken from the grave; skeletons." Luckily, Mary was still of working age, and was transported to a large agricultural farm in Germany where she cultivated sugar beets and worked in open fields. Here, she twisted her ankle and was threatened to be sent back to Shtudhoff.

This job too did not last long. Mary was then sent to a freight station in Riga to keep the train crossing in shape. Here, news and gossip was passed from Jews on the trains of the Russians being captured. One day, Mary was taken away from this work and ordered to walk in a Death March. 1,000 women walked through the bitter cold streets of snow with no food, eating what they could find in garbage cans. They linked arms to hold each other up, because they knew if they sat down to catch their breath, they would be shot. One girl Mary knew approached an officer and told them she did not feel well. They told her to open her mouth, and proceeded to shoot her. Mary kept on walking, walking to live not only for herself, but also for her lost family. Not long after the March ended, Mary being one of only 200 women that survived, the war ended. One morning when the women woke up in an empty warehouse, there was complete silence in the streets outside. One woman left the building, soon to return back screaming with the news of the end of the war.

After being put in a hospital for many months, Mary became healthy again. Retreating back to broken and worn Vilna, nothing was the same. The people, the passion and the culture were all destroyed. After leaving and moving to Israel, then to America, Mary articulates, "What can you do? Just live in the memories."

Anshel Fried

By Benjamin Wachs

A Story of Courage

At 92 years of age, Anshel Fried has lived a life full of adversity and struggle, but with great strength and determination, he has survived. He has lived in many different countries and has fought bravely for the survival of the Jewish people. He has a devoted family and, despite all odds, Anshel Fried is alive today to tell his story.

Anshel was born in Breslau, Germany on April 16th, 1918. His father was a WWI Prisoner of War. At a very young age, Anshel moved to Novodvor, Poland, a small town of approximately 7,800 inhabitants just 31 kilometers from Warsaw. Anshel remembers making the 8-hour trek on foot to Warsaw on several occasions in order to avoid paying for the train. "It was two dollars—it was a lot of money". Despite Novodvor's fifty percent Jewish population, anti-Semitism was extremely prevalent. Anshel's father, a trained engineer, was not allowed to practice his trade and was forced to become an arborist to support the family.

Throughout his life, Anshel reflected, he had never been very religious. However, his Jewish identity is still very important to him. "I was born a Jew, I lived as a Jew, and I will die as a Jew," he explained. As a child, Anshel went to the synagogue every week. He belonged to a Zionist youth group called Hashomer Hav. Through this group Anshel began to hear rumors of Hitler and the Nazi's rise to power and the threat that the Nazi regime posed to the Jews of Germany and beyond.

When the war first broke out in September 1939, Anshel was 21 and determined to escape Poland. He understood what it would mean to him, as a Jew, once the Nazi's invaded. He planned to flee with a group of his peers to the Soviet Union, one of the few countries that accepted Jews at the time. His entire family, including four brothers and two sisters, did not share his dire predictions of what the future held in store for the Jews, and his father knew that it would be nearly impossible to move the entire family away from Poland. Anshel distinctly remembers pleading with his father to let him bring his younger sister with him. His father, however, stood firmly against this idea, accusing Anshel of being a communist for wanting to flee to Russia.

When Anshel made his final decision and prepared to leave on his own, his father suddenly realized that he might never see his son again. "Twenty-one years of raising you, and then you are gone", Anshel recalls his father saying, "My father cried. It was very sad". In one of the most heart-wrenching moments of his life, Anshel left his family in tears, not knowing what the future would hold for either him or the family he left behind, and departed for Russia. In fact, his father's premonition was true. Anshel was never to see his family again.

Shortly after his arrival in Russia, Anshel moved to Minsk where he found work driving a tractor on a Kolkhoz--a collective farm somewhat similar to a Kibbutz. While in Minsk, Anshel attempted to send food packages with flour to make matzo back to his family who had, by then,

had moved to the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw. By 1942, however, Anshel received word that his entire family had perished.

In 1942, Anshel was drafted into the Soviet Army, and began his long military career. He was quickly moved to the 2nd Polish Division, when it was established later that year. Anshel was assigned to operate heavy machine guns against the Nazi's in Smolinsk and in Poland. "Maybe you have seen in the movies," he said, demonstrating how he used to operate the gun. Later, he showed me a piece of shrapnel that was still buried in his finger, 70 years after the war. Anshel fought in gruesome conditions and many of his comrades were killed before his eyes. He even remembers using dead Nazi soldiers as benches during meal times.

Anshel's most powerful memories during the war come from his involvement in the liberation of Majdanek, a Nazi death camp, in 1944. Upon entering the camp, he remembers the starkly shocking image of thousands of children's shoes and piles of dead bodies. Many soldiers broke into tears. "The ovens that were used to kill the Jews were still warm as we liberated the camp," remembers Anshel. The soldiers made quick work of hanging the German soldiers, but that could not make up for the innocent lives that were lost.

Shortly before the war ended, Anshel remembers the Polish division sending a rabbi to join the Jewish troops for Passover. This was the first time since the war began that he and his Jewish comrades had seen a rabbi.

Anshel came out of the war a captain in the army, with a full military education. Shortly after the war ended, in 1945, he returned to his hometown, Novodvor. Upon returning, he found the town very unwelcoming. Knowing of the deaths of his family and so many of his comrades from Novodvor, he was constantly plagued with the question "Why aren't you dead yet?"

Anshel finally left the Polish army in 1947, and attempted to illegally flee to Palestine. However, he did not make it, and was sent by the British to a camp in Cyprus. Although this was not where he wanted to be, it was in this camp that Anshel met his future wife, Ayda. In 1948, after a few months together in Cyprus, they were married. Anshel reminisced about the unique circumstances of the wedding in the crowded English camp. "There were eight-hundred weddings in one day!" he exclaimed, "They gave one bottle of wine for three couples". Soon after their marriage, British foreign secretary Ernest Bevin allowed the Jewish refugees to leave Cyprus and enter the newly formed State of Israel.

Life in Israel in those early days was tough. "We didn't have anything," Anshel recalls, "we were so poor." Soon after his arrival, he was again drafted into the military, and quickly put into service as a sharpshooter in the Israeli War of Independence. "I have good eyes even now, look at how old I am and I still do not need glasses," he explained to me. Anshel's military service did not end with the War of Independence. He would be called into service one more time in his life in the Suez War of 1956.

While living in Israel, Ayda gave birth to their two children, Moshe and Tuvia. However, as the children grew up, Ayda became increasingly worried about their well- being, especially with the prospect of them having to serve in the military. "Israel was no monkey business,"

Anshel explained. He left Israel with his family, bound for America in 1964. He and his two sons have lived in America ever since. Despite the fact that Anshel no longer lives in Israel, he has maintained a deep connection to the Jewish State his whole life. He emphasized this several times telling me “Every Jewish boy and girl must go to Israel”.

Anshel Fried is a survivor in every sense of the word. The world of his childhood was brutally destroyed. At a young age Anshel set out on his own to start a new life in a very dangerous place and time. With bravery and courage, he not only fought against the Nazis but also went on to fight for the survival of the new Jewish State. Throughout the weeks that I have visited with Anshel to hear his story, I have felt compassion for his suffering, humbled by his extraordinary bravery, and grateful for his willingness to share his important past.

Esther Jachimowicz

By Sharon Aucar

And I Continue to Wonder

I never really thought much about war. I always believed it couldn't affect me. But in September of 1939, everything changed.

My name is Esther Jachimowicz. I was 14, had a boyfriend and life felt normal. I was one of three children. My mother stayed at home while my father was a shoemaker. My father was the first one to hear about the war, the camps and the gas chambers, through word of mouth and rumors. Nobody believed it until we saw it for ourselves.

In September of 1939, the Nazis closed off a part of my hometown, Lodz, and sent Jews to the ghetto they had created. Five years passed by and every day people died of starvation. The best food we could get our hands on was potato peels.

One day the Nazis separated the children from the adults. My mother refused to let go of my six-year old sister, Rivka. They were both shot by the Germans right in front of my eyes.

In the ghetto, my 13-year old sister, Helga, and I were sent to work while my father was separated from us and taken somewhere else. I never knew where he had been sent.

In May of 1944, Helga and I were sent to Auschwitz. When we got there, I was told to change into a dress that was too short for me and my sister into a dress that was too long for her. We were put to work in a shoe shop, making shoes for the German soldiers who were fighting in the front. After work, we were allowed to take a shower. Nazi guards told us which line to stand in to enter the showers. Some of us would come out alive, and others would never be seen again.

In 1945, we were sent to Stutthof concentration camp in Poland, where men and women were separated by an electrical fence. A woman saw her husband, ran to him and was killed instantly by the fence. I kept telling my sister that it would be over soon, but she kept saying she did not want to live. Every day at 5 in the morning we would be forced to go to an appeal; we stood outside in the freezing cold with no coats or shoes, and the Germans would count how many of us were left. On one of the appeals, Helga just fell down and died. I ran over to her, screaming and crying, telling her to wake up, but she was already gone. A German police woman came over and told me that if I didn't stop crying, she would kill me. In my anger and frustration, I yelled at her in perfect German and left her astounded. The next day she took me out of there, and sent me to a German hospital so I could escape death for at least a little longer. I spoke very good Polish and German so I was able to help the nurses. They even let me help deliver a baby once!

One day, I was taking a bucket of food to a family member I had seen not too far from the hospital. As I was heading back, I saw the hospital being bombed by the Americans. They

saw the Nazi symbol and just threw their bombs. They not only killed Germans, but Jews as well. I couldn’t believe how lucky I had been to escape death yet again.

On April 25, 1945 the Soviet forces were in the Danzig Region. Hearing of this, the SS forced all of us who were left in Stutthof to go to the coast. They put us on small boats with nothing but the clothes on our backs. Many people didn't want to be sent off into the ocean so they were shot instead. Others drowned. On my boat there were about 12 people; all starving and dehydrated. We began to drink the salty ocean water, which just made it worse because the salt made us even thirstier.

On the boat, we lost all track of all time. All of a sudden, we saw an English ship heading towards us. They saw us too. They saved us by putting us on their boat and giving us food. Unfortunately, some people ate so fast after eating almost nothing for so many years that they died.

Five years later, by 1950, I had a husband and a newborn child. The Joint American Jewish Organization sponsored us so we could go to America. We got on a ship and went to New York. After that, we went to Philadelphia and lived there for a few years. In 1962, my family and I finally came to San Francisco. We opened a tailoring business that was ours for 40 years, and lived happily. I had come to start a new life with a family of my own and a newly found hope.

Now, I think back and wonder why I didn’t die. I wonder what made me so lucky to survive it all. And I continue to wonder.

Harry Recht

By Gabriel Lopez Low

A Brother's Love

Mere moments before the selection process that would determine his fate, Chaim had given up. Separated from his sisters and parents, terribly sick with typhus and starving to death, he had every reason to lose hope; just as so many had done before him against the same insurmountable circumstances. At a time when those around him were perishing left and right, his fate was sealed—or so it seemed. Instead, Chaim survived that selection process and eventually survived every ghetto and concentration camp he was imprisoned in throughout the Holocaust. He had someone watching over him every step of the way, assuring his survival and caring for him when he couldn't care for himself. In this particular situation, Chaim survived because his protector learned which group of inmates would be sent to the gas chambers, and which would survive. Using this information, he risked his own safety to sneak Chaim into the fortunate group, when he surely would have been placed into the doomed contingent. The one who put his own neck on the line for Chaim's safety was none other than his older brother, Moishe.

Twenty-one years earlier, in 1920, the year Chaim Mordechai Recht was born, none of this seemed possible. Poland, Chaim's home country, had just regained its independence post World War I as the Second Polish Republic, after centuries of foreign rule. Chaim was born in the large city of Kielce, Poland, but he and his family moved to a town near the German border when he was young. Deeply religious, the Recht family fulfilled their duties as Orthodox Jews with unflinching devotion. Chaim attended a special Jewish school and was immersed in the tight-knit Jewish community of his town. His father, Bernard, owned a local chocolate factory, which supported their modest yet comfortable lifestyle, and provided Chaim with a generous supply of sweets. In Poland, a general anti-Semitic sentiment was prevalent and there was little cross-cultural interaction. Barred from leaving their house on certain Christian holidays, the Recht family understood the unstable situation the Jews were in, but couldn't grasp the future importance it had. Next door in Germany, they knew that the Nazis were gaining power, but it was unclear what effect that would have on their country, if any at all.

In Germany, the vast majority of the population was struggling, and the Nazis presented a solution, promising economic success and the return of Germany to the world stage. According to Harry (Chaim's new name upon entering the United States), "Even some Jews supported Hitler, because they believed he would improve the economy." When asked whether he believed the Nazi's rise could lead to something like the Holocaust considering Hitler's anti-Jewish book *Mein Kamp*, he said, "We didn't believe that anything like this could happen…it was just a book." However, it was not just a book, and once Hitler seized power, the Jews ultimately had little hope of survival. Not until Jews were forced to flee Germany to Poland did Chaim truly understand the gravity of the situation. When war broke out and the Nazis invaded Poland, Chaim and his family fled the German border in fear and walked nonstop for seven days back to Kielce with the Nazis in pursuit. Completely overpowered by their superior military, Poland surrendered to Nazi control after only seven days of combat.

Days after they arrived back in Kielce, the Nazis were upon the city and proceeded to round up the Jewish population and force them into a ghetto. Although the Nazis didn't immediately know which citizens were Jews, many of the Poles were more than happy to be of assistance pointing out the Jews in return for "a bottle of whiskey." In 1940, along with his sisters, brother and parents, Chaim was ushered into the Kielce Ghetto, walled in on all sides and constantly demoralized by the Nazi guards. It was there that Chaim would spend the next two years, living with his relatives in perpetual fear, sickness and starvation. Along with his brother, he worked at a German soldier's depot, supplying car parts to German soldiers without pay. Despite the twelve-hour workdays and terrible working conditions, Chaim persevered under the watchful and concerned eyes of older brother Moishe. In 1941, a typhus epidemic hit the Kielce Ghetto, killing thousands of Jews. The disease spread rampantly due to the unsanitary living conditions and cramped quarters that were crawling with the deadly lice. Chaim contracted the disease, and was one of the few fortunate ones to overcome it, but not without severe mental and emotional distress.

Having taken away their homes, their possessions, their health and their independence, the Nazis still were not done with the Recht family. The next way they strove to dehumanize them was to take away their identity. One night, while living in the ghetto, Chaim's father came home with his beard cut off completely. "As a matter of fact, I didn't recognize him, because he always had his beard," says Harry. As an Orthodox Jew, his beard was a symbol of his devotion to God and made up a part of who he was. To the Nazis, this meant nothing, and as he was walking home, they stopped him on the street and publicly hacked off his beard for everyone to see. For Chaim, the image of his father so vulnerable and demoralized was one he would never forget; it was "as if something was missing from his life."

In 1942, the orders for a transfer came through and Chaim and his brother were transferred to the Skarzysko-Kamienne labor camp, permanently separated from the rest of their family. The two of them went to work in a German ammunition factory for the following year, in conditions worse than the ghetto they had just left. Their lives were a constant struggle: a struggle for food, a struggle for sleep, and most importantly a struggle for hope. Life in the camp was contradictorily monotonous yet anxious, as they had the same back-breaking days over and over again for a full year, while the chance of possible relocation or death loomed over them at all times. A special division of workers in this factory was forced to work with a certain type of ammunition that served as an eventual death sentence to anyone who spent time with it. It would start by dyeing workers' whole bodies yellow, and a month later or so, most workers would be dead. Chaim and Moishe had the extremely good fortune of not working with this particular ammunition, but "yellow people would come to our camp once in a while, but they didn't last too long," Harry pointed out.

In 1943, they were once again transferred, this time to Czestochowa—a new year, a new camp and a new ammunition factory. In Czestochowa, food sources were scarce, and Chaim was suspended in a state of constant hunger that threatened death at all times. Sickness was common at the camp, and the lack of doctors led to massive deaths. Although Chaim did get sick at various times, he had his older brother to look out for him and care for him. Looking back, Harry says, "if you were on your own, you had a small chance of living, but if you stuck together you

had a better chance." His brother and him did exactly that, and overcame every obstacle they were faced with together.

From Czestochowa, Chaim and Moishe were sent to Buchenwald, a German concentration camp, where they did nothing but wait, either to be transferred, or to be killed. They did not work; rather they spent their days in the barracks, waiting in fear, unsure of their future. After a month of dread, they were once again transferred, this time to Dora, another German camp. In Dora, Chaim and his brother were working with the V1 and V2 missiles used by the Nazis in air raids over Britain. The British tried many times to bomb Dora, but because it was completely underground, the planes could not access the missiles. For Chaim and Moishe, working underground meant terrible conditions and sickness, and this time Moishe was unable to care for Chaim. Split apart into different shifts, the brothers wouldn't see each other all day except for in passing when one went to work and the other returned to the barracks. For six months, they worked eight-hour shifts spending three hours getting back and forth from the barracks, on only a few hours of sleep. The moments they got to see each other in passing became the highlights of their days, and pushed Chaim to keep his head up and not lose faith. As 1944 came to a close, the Germans were losing ground quickly and it was clear the war was almost over, as the desperation of the Nazis to finish the job they started became apparent.

In a last ditch effort to eliminate all the Jews of the camp, the Nazis transferred everyone from Dora to the death camp Bergen-Belsen, where Chaim and his brother, among others, were once again left to wait. Weighing around 80 pounds, Chaim was on the edge of starvation, and had little chance of living much longer. The Jews sensed the general unease among the Nazis and knew that liberation was just around the corner, however the question was whether they would survive to see it or not. On April 15, 1945, British troops entered Bergen-Belsen and took control, liberating all 60,000 Jews left in the camp. However, the danger was not gone, as thousands of Jews died soon after when the British troops gave the malnourished inmates rations from the Nazis supplies. Due to their unhealthy condition, their bodies couldn't take such substantial food and they died rapidly. Chaim and Moishe, luckily, did not receive the Nazi's rations, and were safe.

From Bergen-Belsen, Chaim and Moishe were relocated to Gottingen, Germany—a university town—where they lived with Germans for the next five years. Supported by American organizations and care packages, Chaim and his brother spent the time recovering and waiting for their American immigration papers to go through. They were to meet their uncle in Denver as soon as they were able-- neither of them wanted to stay in Europe. After five long years of waiting, he received the papers that not only cleared him to come to America, but also changed his name to Harry. He quickly booked a ticket on a ship from Hamburg to New Orleans, eager to start a new life. His brother had made the journey three months earlier, and this trip was the first huge endeavor he undertook completely on his own, dependent on no one. On the ship that would take him to this new life, he met the woman that would one day become his wife. When Harry met Sally, a fellow Polish Holocaust survivor, he couldn't help but believe that things happened for a reason.

Sally Recht

By Ezra Stoller

More Than Just a Roll of the Dice

"Look, ah! I flipped just to the right page. Ezra, you see this is me and my sisters," said Sally, pointing to the faces in the black and white photo. "That's me, and my sister Annie, and - wait a second. Yes, that's Miriam…Can I get you something? Juice? A cookie?"

"Oh, water would be great, thanks," I said, as I got out my paper and pen from my bag. "Are you sure?"

"Sally, he said he wanted water," said Harry, sitting at the dinner table by the window.

*****

Before World War II, Sally interacted with Jews and gentiles alike, but still faced anti-Semitism. "In town, my father sold fabric. One time, a woman tried to steal fabric. My father saw her and ran after her. This woman yelled 'The Jew is trying to kill me!' Fortunately, she was taken to the police station, but you see, it was never *our* country," said Sally with a matter-of-fact shrug of the shoulders. I sipped my water and nibbled on my first cookie and continued to write.

When Sally first heard World War II was breaking out, she was almost a little excited, after all the things she had heard about World War I. She didn't realize what was to come. Without warning, a ghetto called "Wierzbnk" was established in her town, As it happened, the ghetto was located in her neighborhood and her family didn't have to move, but they did have to open their home up to others. Everyone was forced to wear a yellow star. Her older brother was in the wrong place at the wrong time and was shot in a back alley within the first few days of the ghetto being established. The unexpected and shocking had become commonplace. "He had the holy book in his arms," said Sally, shaking her head, as she remembered her brother Barl.

Without warning, in 1942, the ghetto was forced to clear out. "All the Judenrat out!" imitated Sally, waving her arm. The sick and old were not spared and, in the chaos, she was not able to say goodbye to her grandparents. They were elderly and not healthy and did not have it in them to make the journey. She heard weeks later that they were shot in the house, sitting on their bed.

"I was very close to my grandparents, so sweet, so caring. My children never met their grandparents. One day when my son was young, his friend was going to visit his grandparents and my son asked me 'What's that?'"

I took a deep breath and we continued.

At the labor camp, Sally and her sisters worked in an ammunition factory and managed to stay together. Her parents were separate from Sally and her sisters. They only got glimpses of

each other one time each month when everyone from the barracks was taken to the communal shower. As her mother's barrack was led out of the shower, Sally's barrack was led in and they were able to wave, but they couldn't run and hug each other. They had to stand single file and remain in their respective lines. Once a month, Sally would be a few feet away from her mother, but never in her arms.

During the time they were forced to work at the ammunition factory, typhus and fevers were common illnesses. "Everyone was sick, not feeling well. But my sister was sick, sick." One night, a Ukrainian guard looked the other way, allowing Sally to escape to get aspirin for her sister. She walked over a half hour to meet a non-Jewish customer of her father's and expected to come back and see the same guard. While she had been gone that night, the guard had changed. She was scared: "People were killed." A couple days earlier, two young women who had sabotaged the equipment they were making were forced to dig their own graves in front of the entire camp and Sally and the others were forced to watch. With the lights surveying the boundary of the camp, Sally managed to re-enter through another entrance and get the medicine to her sister unscathed.

"My sisters and I were eventually forced into cattle trains and taken to Auschwitz. It took over a week and--"

"Sorry, Sally, "I said. "But what happened to your mother and father?"

"They–" She paused. "They did not make it. My father was sent to Treblinka and my mother, well, she did not make it. But she always said 'Watch the child,' who was my younger sister Miriam. My mother was watching over us though," muttered Sally with a sad smile.

When Sally and her sisters arrived at Auschwitz, they encountered the putrid black fumes of burning human bones. There were screaming SS and barking German shepherd dogs.

"They were rough; they took us to a room, took our clothing and were harsh. I guess they didn't pull our hair because there was no hair to pull." Sally explained how everyone's hair had been shaved off.

"Do you know German? Could you understand what they were ordering you to do?" I asked.

"You didn't have to know German. Their tone and body language was enough."

In the barracks, Sally and her sisters always tore off a small piece of bread from their allotted rations, an inch off the bottom for an emergency. Once, someone stole their emergency extra bread. "We knew this one particular woman had taken it, but she survived and afterwards came to us and told us that she still feels sick thinking about why she did it, but she was so hungry she couldn't help it," said Sally. Hunger was always on her mind and there was not much variation from meal to meal. Sally explained that "The 'soup,' well, the water would be a little darker or lighter, but that's about it." Although Sally constantly felt hungry, others showed clearer signs of starvation, their bones becoming more and more pronounced. A warm bed and a

good night's sleep was what Sally missed most. She slept with a dozen people, stacked like sardines on one queen size bed. When one person wanted to turn over, everyone else had to move as well. Warmth was always on her mind.

Most days when Sally and her older sister, Annie, were outside doing their assigned useless tasks, Miriam would stay in the barracks to try and stay warm. One morning, Sally had a feeling and told Annie, "Let's take the child with us." "It was like a premonition," said Sally with conviction. That morning, everyone not out "working" was rounded up and taken to the gas chamber.

Another time at Auschwitz, Miriam had a fever and was taken to get medical care. "This was not a hospital. The doctors were not doctors. Bad doctors." Sally and Annie knew what would happen to those who were taken to the doctors. Surprisingly, the German nurses took to Miriam and thought she was so sweet, smart and young. While Miriam was in the hospital, Dr. Mengele came to make a selection, and the nurses knew that those selected would be taken to the gas chambers. The nurses decided to protect Miriam and hid Miriam under the linens. The next morning, Sally and Annie asked the nurses what happened and they said: "Here is your sister."

Perhaps Sally's mother was watching over her three daughters, yet Sally still wonders if, "G-d was on vacation." The SS knew when specific Jewish holidays were and on Yom Kippur, Sally was taken to the river to get water and got a "double whipping" on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Although this unprecedented cruelty seemed endless, the Russians were making advances from the east, and those who remained in Auschwitz were marched west. Retrospectively, Sally told me that "They would have killed us all, they just didn't have time."

Although Sally had left Auschwitz, she continued to be hungry and live in fear of the SS. One night, as Sally and her sisters were being marched through a small town, Sally was lagging. She had been told to speed up by an SS trooper, but before she could, a German shepherd lunged at her and then she fell to the ground. Then she heard a gun shot. "I thought I had been killed," Sally recalled. "I remember feeling people's feet stepping on me and thinking, maybe this is what it feels like to be dead." Sally got back on her feet and caught up with her sisters. Gunshots were so common that her sisters did not even realize what had just happened.

In the final days of the march, Sally remembered seeing the first signs of German defeat. A female guard took off her hat and said to Sally "That's the way our hat's going to fly" and threw the hat into the river. Another SS even told her that this would be "Their end and your beginning." When the Russians liberated them, the struggle was not over. Sally and her sisters were told by a Jewish Russian soldier in Yiddish to hide in barn to avoid the bullets. Despite the war coming to an end, the Germans still showed little kindness to the Jews. The Russian soldier took Sally and her sisters to the German farmhouse and ordered the German family to take care of them. The Russians told the German family they would be back to make sure that Sally and her sisters were being well taken care of. Sally remembered thinking about pound cake and a warm glass of milk. As if someone could read her mind, one of the Germans came to her room with cake and tall glass of milk, the first sip of milk Sally had tasted in many years. "It was tasty!" exclaimed Sally, breaking a smile.

Sally and her sisters stayed at this farmhouse for about three weeks and, not knowing where to go next, took Russian military trains to return to their hometown. The Poles that remained in her hometown of Wierzbnk took one look at them and said to them, "So many, still?"

"Ezra, they were surprised. The Germans killed so many of us, and still these Jewish girls were still alive. They said 'The streets are yours. The houses are ours.'" The one night they spent in Wierzbnk, two mothers and three children were killed. Sally and her sisters were no longer welcome and were threatened in their own hometown. Sally and her sisters took many trains en route to Lodz, hiding in the bathroom when the conductor came around to see the passengers' tickets. After spending some time in Lodz, Sally arrived in Bergen Belsen, which had become a refugee camp. Sally recalled that "Some got married because well, lots of young people, and they were lonely." This was a place of both reunion and tragedy. Some would serendipitously realize a family member thought long dead was still alive and others would hear the news that a family member had perished.

After five years of waiting, Sally was on a boat to America, leaving from Hamburg headed to New Orleans. Three days before disembarking, Sally met Harry.

"What do you know? It really was when Harry met Sally!" said Sally with a grin.

*****

Perhaps serendipity, luck, and coincidence allowed Sally and her two sisters to survive the Holocaust together and even meet her husband. But maybe it was more than a roll of the dice and indeed was due to her mother watching over her. Sally, now a proud mother and grandmother, realized that without the lessons and values her grandparents and parents instilled in her, she would not have survived. She hopes that her grandchildren will feel loved by her in the same way she was loved by her grandmother. Still full of positive light, Sally enjoys every day and told me "If I don't have something, I don't need it, but if I have it, I enjoy it."

"Ezra, I know you'll be fine, but I'll walk you to the door. It's European of me. Do you need any food for the road?"

"Well, I –"

"Okay, these cookies are pretty good. Take it for the road - just in case."

With a warm hug, we said our goodbyes.

"Until next time!"

Sally encouraged me to enjoy the little pleasures in life and I am lucky to have been nurtured by Sally in a loving grandmotherly way. As I left, Sally reminded me, "enjoy those cookies with some milk!"

Tauba Weiss

By Geny Rabinovich

When G-d Was On Vacation

At twelve o'clock one afternoon in September 1939, my mother, Spinsa, was in the kitchen cooking potatoes for our large Jewish family of nine, when chaos exploded in the streets of Poland. In an instant, our house was bombarded with SS officers carrying guns and telling us to evacuate our home. I heard my mom yelling, "Tauba, Tauba, we have to leave!"At that time, the reason for our departure was unknown, but we quickly realized that tragedy would ensue.

My family and I were placed in the Lask Ghetto in 1939. I worked as a tailor, making uniforms for the Nazis. That bothered me more than anything, because all I had on me to keep me warm was a striped wool coat. Rarely did I get to see my family, because we were separated due to our gender. Strangely, I reconnected with an old family friend I was once introduced to - his name was Leo. He was the only one I trusted enough to communicate with.

In 1942, all 6,000 people from our city of Lask were crowded into a church. Those who did not fit, roughly sixty people, were shot to death. I will never forget what horror I first saw - a woman by the name of Golda Bondz was in labor. At that very instant they threw her and her newborn into a pit and buried them alive. Before we could even process what was happening, we were locked up for three days with no food, water, or bathrooms. The only thing we had was the clothes on our back and each other. After we endured seventy-two hours of hunger and weakness, the SS officers divided the population in half. The right side was those who were strong and left side was considered to be weak. I was quickly separated from my father, Noah, and brother, Gabriel, who were on the right side. Considering that I am more of a tomboy and had a close relationship with the males in my family, I ran to their side and left my mom and six siblings behind. Fortunately, I was lucky because many people were shot to death running from side to side. Once the separation was complete, guards loaded people on trucks and took them to Chelmno, a concentration camp, where they were to be either buried alive or gassed to death. As I watched my mother and six siblings board the truck, I knew it would be the last time I saw them. At that very moment I realized, G-d was on vacation.

That same year, I left my only friend, Leo, and was moved to the Lodz Ghetto with my father and brother where they put me to work as a shoemaker. I created shoes from straw with my bare hands for the Nazis. As if making clothes for them wasn't bad enough, but now I had to provide comfort for their feet. There was a lack of food, and I was weak from the long hours of work. My work load only further expanded when I began working as a janitor. I worked from sunrise to sunset. I learned that I had been separated from Gabriel and my father almost instantaneously after our arrival. I was speechless. I had never felt so alone and helpless in my life. However, I didn't grieve- not because I didn't want to, but because I didn't have the energy or strength. From this point on, I was constantly being separated from my father and brother. Luckily, we were always reunited.

In 1944, I was forced onto a train to Auschwitz. A few days before my departure, I was accidentally reunited with my father and brother. It was the only moment of joy I could recall. Once we arrived at Auschwitz, the first thing to catch my eye was the famous saying plastered on the gates, *arbeit macht frei*, "work makes you free." I felt as if they had found a way to use the word "slave," because that's what we were. We were either treated like slaves, or treated like animals. The word "freedom" to us was unheard of: it was more like a joke. After I spent a whole year in Auschwitz, I was transferred around three different areas for a year's duration; Birkenau Stutthof, and Dresden.

I arrived in Birkenau in 1945. I do not remember much, but what I do remember was I didn't eat, I didn't sleep, I didn't live. People around me were malnourished, covered in feces because they were too weak to walk, and begging for death.

After a few months, we were relocated to Stutthof. When we arrived, I was immediately placed in a huge barrack. It was a nice change from the gravel we slept on in Birkenau. I was cooped up in a room full of women who were slowly dying. Some would fall asleep and never wake up; others would try to put themselves out of misery by starving themselves. It was frightful, but Stutthof was one of the better camps; we actually got food on a daily basis. Every day we would receive soup - if you can call it that. This "soup" consisted of leaves, water, and sand. On the better days, we would receive a slice of bread that was supposed to last a week, but we ate it within the first few seconds it was handed to us. I was afraid to overfill myself, so I would call my brother across the fence and throw my leftovers to my father and to him. Every night we experienced an *Appeal:* everyone from the camp was brought outside in the snow, naked. Nazis would torture us by pouring ice water all over our shivering bodies, and if we tried to share body heat, we would get severely beaten. At least a third of the group died from frost bite. Nazis would find new ways of torture every day. An SS officer by the name of Erta beat me every day. The reason behind this was that I had large bosoms, but I didn't wear a bra. I knew she just wanted to find any excuse to beat me. Even if I was to wear a bra, I would get beaten. At that point, nothing surprised me.

A few months after that, we were once again shipped to a different location, Dresden, an ammunition factory. I made bullets for the Nazi guns. With every bullet I created, I couldn't help but think that this bullet would eventually kill one of my people. I wanted nothing more than to load a gun with my hand-made bullets and begin executing every Nazi I encountered. Unfortunately, that was just a daydream. On February 12th, 1945, Dresden was bombed. My father told us to hide in the basement of the demolished building. After three days my father explained to me that we would see each other soon, but in the meanwhile I had to go into hiding on my own. I waited until darkness fell, then I ran. My first idea was the cemetery. I managed to wash myself with snow and the reef soup, which was very popular in Poland, I miraculously obtained. In doing so, I failed to notice the white residue I left behind on the gravel. Right as I finished rinsing myself off, I heard an SS officer heading toward me. I quickly dug a hole into the ground and buried myself in hope of survival. I could feel the ground moving. This is how I knew people were recently buried alive. I could hear that the SS officers noticed the residue I left behind. They began to search for me. I waited for hours until I could feel no more footsteps above me and no movement beside me. The next thing I knew I was on the run again.

Before I knew it, I was captured and taken prisoner by a Nazi. I did not know of my father's longings nor of my brother's. I was alone, again. A German lady entered into our jail cell to choose twelve people to work for her on her property. Lucky, I was one of them. We were driven to her home, and once we entered, she nominated me as her cook. While the others were slaving on the field, I was cooking. No one knew I was Jewish because I took the name of a woman who had passed away, Bronka Kengerska, who was our town's janitor. A man by the name of Bibov, who was closely affiliated with my father, had made me those Polish papers. Although I had a different name, I will never forget a comment that was once made to me, “Bronka, you cook like a Jew.” All I could do was smile inside.

While I was working for the German woman, I learned about my family's whereabouts. I then packed my stuff, and traveled to my father's old business in Lask. He was a baker, but in the back of that bakery he had a Halutsim- a place where an estimated 60 Jewish boys and girls worked, aspiring to travel to their homeland, Israel. I learned that my father and Gabriel were living in the old Halutsim with a few Jews who were rescued by my father. When I arrived, we rejoiced. My father managed to bring me some potatoes to cook for celebration. As I was cooking, the condensation from the cooking went up the chimney. During the war smoke rising from chimneys let out a sign to reveal the presence of Jews. A group of Russians entered our shack. Everyone got away except for me; I was abducted by a Russian who held a gun to my head. I saw my life flash right before my very eyes, my breathing stopped, and I was asking G-d: *Why? Why me? I didn't do anything to deserve this!* As I was praying for a quick and painless death, he was grabbed by a fellow soldier to run away, because the Germans were coming.

We were liberated May 7, 1945.

On May 10, 1945, as I was walking back to the Halutism, the bridge of Lagovniska, once so familiar to me, was bombed. The bridge was covered with dead bodies- infants, youth, parents, and grandparents; all lying in a scattered pattern one piled over the other, but I was alive and once again fighting for my life. I swam as fast as I could, and once I reached the land, I couldn't believe how G-d had spared my life once again.

At the end of June, we boarded a wagon to go back home. When we arrived, we were unwelcome. My family and I lived in a room for a period of time with only a translucent cover over our broken window that helped separate us from the dangers of the outside world. A few of our relatives came to live with us. That was when I found the love of my life, Moris Weiss. He was my cousin and he proposed to me. We got married on July 4, 1945.

In the year of 1946, I registered myself and my husband for America, my brother for Canada, and my father for Israel. That year, my husband and I stayed behind as my father and brother departed with the knowledge of one day reuniting. In 1951, an uncle invited me and my family and to live with him in Petaluma. Although my dream was to go to San Francisco, I decided to move to Petaluma for the meantime. There, I raised chickens and controlled a farm, but Petaluma did not feel like home to me.

In the next few years, we finally packed our stuff to go to our permanent home, San Francisco. This is when I knew I had everything I ever wanted. As I passed through the streets of

San Francisco, I had noticed that my past caught up with me. On 46th and Taravel was a swatstika hanging from a Nazi library. I felt my blood turn into fire, my chest grew deeper with every breath, and the nightmares that sign have brought me. I grabbed my husband, and we proudly demolished that library. I didn't do it just for myself; I did it for my people.

Living through the Holocaust and the near death situations helped me find a deeper meaning in life. Although the traumatic events and memories will forever haunt me, I will go on with living my life. I currently live in the city of my dreams, with a family of my own. I am now an activist in spreading awareness of the true events of the Holocaust, proof of our history for future generations.

Assemblymember Jeff Miller

District 71

Is honored to present the story of World War II veteran

Sam Harry Stone *In his own words*

Sam Harry Stone

My name is Sam Harry Stone. I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on August 22, 1924. My parents were immigrant Polish Jews from Warsaw, Poland. I did not learn to speak English until I was about 5 years old.

Before entering the Air Force, I attended the University of Pittsburgh for one semester. Following discharge from the service I attended UCLA where I obtained a Bachelor's Degree as well as a Master's Degree. I then went to the Chicago Medical School where I gained an M.D.

Since I was aware of the Nazi atrocities in Poland, especially with regard to the Jews, I wanted to get into the service, but my mother would not sign the enlistment papers. I went to the draft board and asked them to draft me as soon as I was eligible. This they did. I volunteered for flight duty and asked the fastest way to get into combat. I was told that aerial gunnery was the way. So I went to Radio School and then Gunnery School, winding up as a radio operator-aerial gunner on a B-17 flying bombing missions over German occupied Europe, including two missions on "D-Day."

There are many ways one finds the path to one's career. Some have a determination from childhood that they will enter some business or profession. Others seem to wander from one thing to another before finding their niche in life. Others are thrust into their life's work by chance or a series of circumstances that seem to be just good fortune. I believe I fall into this latter category.

Since childhood I dreamt of being a military aviator. All my spare time seemed to be taken up by reading aviation magazines and building model airplanes. The walls of my room were covered with pictures cut from magazines and, from the ceiling, I hung model airplanes I had built. Prior to WWII, the Army required two years of college-level engineering for admission as an Aviation Cadet. This was my goal when I enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh. However, carrying 15 units and working two half-days and all day Saturday was too much for me to handle. I struggled and did manage passing grades but barely. Moreover, being young and patriotic, I wanted to get into the war and do my part before it was all over. Since my mother would not give her approval for me to enlist I went to the draft board and asked to be drafted as soon as possible. At the end of the term I was inducted into the Army.

Whether I volunteered or whether it was just the "luck of the draw," I wound up in the Air Force. I believe it was called the U.S. Army Air Corps or perhaps the U.S. Army Air Force at that time. However, one had to volunteer for a flying assignment. In any event, I became a radio-operator aerial-gunner on a B-17 flying bombing missions against the Germans from a base in England. Several crews of enlisted men shared one barracks, a Quonset Hut. Wynne's Crew was one of them. Long's Crew, as we were called, became friendly with them. Their Engineer-Top-Turret Gunner was a fellow named Tom Bonner. Unfortunately, Wynne's Crew was shot down and the fate of the crew-members unknown.

My job, besides being the radio-operator, was also to man the machine protruding from the top of the radio room. The top hatch had to be opened and the gun displaced from the stowed position. In addition, I had to procure the codes to be used by myself and the pilot and co-pilot. The radio-operator was also given boxes of "chaff" strips of paper with a metal coating on one side. These were packaged in a bundle which was torn open by pulling a string running through the bundle. The bundle was torn open prior to release through a small chute in the wall of the radio compartment. The intended purpose was to confuse the radar-operated anti-aircraft guns. I don't know what others thought about "chaff" but the German anti-aircraft fire seemed to be "right-on" in spite of it. Later I decided to drop soda-pop bottles through the chute as well. I thought the noise they made while falling might scare someone to death. I did that only one or twice. I got tired of lugging the bottles out to the plane.

The task I really dreaded was to jettison any bombs hung-up in the bomb-bay. If this occurred, my job was to go on a portable oxygen bottle, enter the bomb-bay, with the bomb-bay doors open, and release any bombs that had not dropped. This was done by a release on the shackle holding the bomb to the bomb rack. If the bomb was on the outboard rack, I had to straddle the open-bomb-bay door to reach the shackle. Try to imagine what it was like to straddle the open bomb-bay, looking down at the ground 25 or 30 thousand feet below while the wind whipped through the bomb-bay. I forgot to mention I also put on my chest parachute before entering the bomb-bay.

D-day started, for me, at about 2:00 A.M. We were awakened to prepare for a bombing mission. Since we were never told the target until briefing, it seemed like any other morning before a mission. After breakfast we headed for the briefing room. Upon arrival we found a major at the door holding a clipboard and checking off the names of all who entered the briefing room. This had never occurred before so we knew something unusual was up. After we were all seated, an officer strode up to the platform behind which was a covered map of the target area. This was the mission map showing the target, the route taken to and from the target as well as the location of flak concentrations and check-points where we could expect to rendezvous with our fighter cover. That was standard procedure. However, when the cover was removed from the map we saw a red ribbon going into the Normandy area and another coming out on a different heading. Another officer climbed onto the platform in front of the map. His first words were, "anyone who divulges any of the information given at this briefing will be shot." We were then given the details, as they pertained to us, of the D-day mission. All fighters, fighter-bombers and medium bombers would have black and white stripes painted around the wings and fuselage. All aircraft must fly the designated routes in and out of the target area. Those that did not would be shot down. We were given an overview of the invasion and then left to make preparations for the mission.

As the radio-operator for our crew, it was my assignment to pick up the radio codes we were to use that day. Our next stop was the equipment room where we kept our heated suits, parachute harnesses and parachutes. From there to the armament shack for our .50 caliber machine guns. This was all loaded on a truck which took us to the aircraft. On arrival at the aircraft we stowed our gear. I installed my machine gun in the top position of the radio compartment and then tuned my radios to the frequencies being used that day. After finishing these tasks I decided to get out of the plane and have a smoke. I walked a short distance away

from the plane, sat down and lit up. I noticed the airplane guard walking back and forth so I offered him a cigarette. He declined the offer. At that time each airplane was guarded by a soldier, carrying a rifle, patrolling back and forth. There was fear of sabotage or German paratroopers dropping on our airfields to destroy the bombers. The guard and I began to talk. He seemed to be no end in sight. He felt that if the invasion would occur soon he would feel his efforts were not in vain. I felt this explosive urge to tell him that today was D-day, but remembering the officer's words, managed to control this impulse. I decided I better leave before I "spilled the beans." I climbed back into the aircraft, went to the radio room and sat down. I few minutes later I thought I heard some one crying softly behind me in the waist. I got up and went back to see what was happening. In the waist I found our engineer and top-turret gunner sitting on the floor quietly sobbing. This was totally out of character for the short, hard-drinking, self-centered individual I had come to know. I thought he was crying because he felt we might not make it back so I said "it's O.K. Jimmy, we will be fine. You know we always make it back." His reply stunned me. "I'm not crying for us. I'm crying for all the poor bastards that are going to die today." I was so overwhelmed by this unexpected response I turned and walked back to the radio room overcome by my own emotions.

When I finished my tour of flying missions I was posted to 3rd Bomb Division headquarters at Elveden Hall, a large estate owned by the Guiness beer family. I was the ground contact to the bomber stream of the 3rd Air Division flying missions into Germany; I did this for several months. However, when I learned of FDR's death I became very depressed and decided to return to the U.S. I was able to do this since I had completed my combat tour. Arrangements were made and I finally boarded a troop ship in Southampton for the voyage home. Our ship left Southampton on May 8, 1945, the day the Germans surrendered.

I don't think anyone can go through a war without being affected by it in some way. However, it is difficult to verbalize what these things are. I certainly appreciate the wonderful country we live in and would not want to live anywhere else. Nowhere else could a poor boy, of immigrant parents, attain what I have attained in my lifetime.

Assemblymember Bill Monning
District 27

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Eda Lew Balsam *Interviewed by Meredith McNamee*

Acknowledgements

Rabbi Eli Cohen
Chadeish Yameinu
Santa Cruz, CA

Eda Lew Balsam

By Meredith McNamee

Escape from Antwerp

Eda Lew Balsam was born on March 13, 1924, in Antwerp, Belgium. Her father, Nathan Lew, was originally from Poland but moved to Belgium as a young man to pursue a career as a diamond merchant. Eda's mother, Anna Axelrod Lew, was born in Russia but spent the majority of her childhood in England during the First World War. Anna moved to Antwerp in her teens and soon married Eda's father and started a family. Prior to the Nazi invasion of Belgium, Eda enjoyed a comfortable childhood with her younger sister, Cecile, and her brother, Maurice. While her family was Jewish and identified with the Jewish community, her parents were not overly active in synagogue life and attended services mainly during High Holy Days. However, this nominal religious activity did not mean that Eda's status as a Jew would go unnoticed. Eda was constantly reminded of her status as a member of the Jewish faith in a city primarily inhabited by Catholics. Eda attended Catholic school, where she was the only Jewish pupil, as her mother believed she would receive a better education there. In school, Eda experienced exclusion and anti-Semitism on a regular basis. Though Eda felt different and ostracized as a child, nothing could have prepared her for the Nazi invasion and the coming war.

Eda recalls hearing rumors about Hitler and the Nazis before they reached Belgium. She remembers her parents telling her not to listen to the BBC radio because they thought it would disturb her. In secret, Eda listened to the radio and learned of countries that were falling under Nazi control, and heard whispers about the impending threat of Hitler's forces and the coming *Blitzkrieg*. On May 10, 1940, Germany invaded Belgium and Eda's life was dramatically changed forever. During a recent interview, Eda told stories of watching German and Allied planes shooting at each other in the sky above her apartment, sometimes plummeting to the ground and setting buildings on fire.

Antwerp, while not the capitol of Belgium, was strategically significant in the war because of its harbor, which was both large and geographically advantageous. When the war reached Antwerp, Eda went from having "a calm and serene childhood" to living in a war zone almost overnight. Under the Nazi regime, many aspects of Eda's day-to-day life were altered. Eda was never forced to wear the Star of David, but there was a "J" stamped on her passport identifying her as a member of the Jewish faith. Eda's liberty was restricted by the German occupation and other than going to school, her parents tried to keep her at home as much as possible after a young female cousin was abducted by the Gestapo and never returned home.

Fortunately for Eda, her father's diamond business had not suffered too greatly due to the War. While there was a predicted collapse of European currencies, diamonds maintained their value and could be used for bartering. Nathan was deeply disturbed by the German occupation of Belgium and believed that the safest and most secure future for his family would be outside of Europe. By bartering his cache of diamonds and asking favors from his non-Jewish associates, Eda's father was able to procure a *Laissez Passer*—a one-way travel document issued by the national government—which granted the family permission to leave the country and go to

France. Nathan Lew's preoccupation with leaving Nazi-occupied Europe was not common in the Jewish community of Antwerp at that time, as many felt that the War was a storm they could weather if they were patient and cooperative. Many members of Eda's family refused to leave Belgium, including her two grandmothers, aunts, uncles and cousins. Even Eda's mother did not want to go, but reluctantly agreed.

Originally, the Lew family planned to reach a port city in France and migrate to England. The family piled into a car with other refugees and drove across the France-Belgium border. As fate would have it, their first attempt to take up temporary residency in France was unsuccessful. An air battle forced the Lew family to abandon their car on their way to the port and hide in a bomb shelter for a few days. Eda said the shelter was horrible, cold and dark; her family listened in fear as bombs hit the ground above them and hoped their lives would be spared. After the battle had ended, the Lews were told to return to Belgium, which they reluctantly agreed to do. The family lived under Nazi rule for almost two more years. Eda remembers being terrified every time she saw the Germans in uniform pass by her house. She cautiously returned to school, though it was not as safe as it had been before. Nathan continued to use bribes and contacts to try and obtain permission to leave Belgium, eventually becoming successful a second time. Eda believes they left Belgium just in time to escape the concentration camps, which took the lives of many of her relatives, friends and acquaintances.

Eda's immediate family made it to Paris and hid in close quarters with another family for about a month. During their time in France, Eda's father had to once again try and negotiate his family's passage out of the country. His French was not very good and he was detained briefly by the French police, which was very stressful to the family in hiding. At the time, the French people were living on rations and everyday Eda's younger sister Cecile went out to wait in the ration line. Cecile was sent because she was smaller than Eda and her parents hoped she was less likely to be abducted. Needless to say, the young girl could not carry very much food and so the Lew family had little to eat. After about a month, Nathan was able to arrange a train trip to Spain and the family finally escaped Nazi-occupied Europe successfully. Eda remembers being deeply touched by the kindness she received from the Spanish people. In Spain, her family acquired passports and was able to book a boat passage to Cuba where they stayed for several months before traveling to Florida and then on to New York where they took up residency in 1941.

Never forgetting her experiences during World War II, Eda to this day remains very "sensitive to injustice." She became very involved in the Civil Rights movement because of her personal familiarity with the dangers of discrimination, participating in the 1963 March on Washington where Martin Luther King delivered his famous "I Had a Dream" speech, and speaking on the radio about genocide because she feels an emotional duty to stand in unity with those experiencing oppression. To this day, Eda believes it is of the utmost importance to fight injustice. When asked what she has done with her time in America, Eda responded, "everything." Eda graduated from New York University in 1974, where she worked during the day and attended school at night, and has worked as a piano accompanist, an administrative assistant and nursery school teacher. She had four children, one now deceased, and seven grandchildren, one who is also deceased. Eda believes she has made peace with what happened during the Holocaust and is inspired by Germany's current progressive political atmosphere. In

2005, she returned to Belgium on vacation to explore her old hometown and has since written a book about her experiences during the Holocaust called, Escape from Antwerp: From Terror to Paradise. Eda moved to Santa Cruz in 1989 and enjoys the life of an active retiree; living near the ocean, playing piano and attending cultural events.

Assemblymember Lori Saldaña

District 76

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Horst Cahn *Interviewed by Kristina Abadjian*

Horst Cahn

By Kristina Abadjian

All That Remains

"Why should the word *hate* exist in my vocabulary?"

This was one of the very first questions Horst asked me when I had the honor of interviewing him. Horst's elucidation about his life and liberation from the Holocaust made me realize how hate can spiral out of control and manifest itself into the complete annihilation of a group of people.

How can one word leave such an indelible mark on millions of helpless people? Here's the story of a boy who lost everything but still maintained a sense of hope even in a world full of despair.

Horst Cahn was born in 1925 in Essen, a town located on the River Ruhr. His parents were well-liked by extended family because they always opened their home to others. Although his sister, Leni, was four years older, Horst always felt like the more worldly of the two because Leni was a bit naïve.

At the age of 13 Horst started working at a bakery as an apprentice but, because he was a Jew, they merely referred to him as an unskilled laborer. The war was starting and anti-Semitism and paranoia were rampant among the Germans.

Horst recalls an evening when he and a German boy working as an apprentice discovered a couple kissing outside. Their curiosity sparked, the two boys held flashlights against a darkened window to have a better look at the lovebirds. Suddenly, the German secret police, referred to as the Gestapo, caught the boys peeping and arrested them both.

The Gestapo believed the boys were spies trying to signal English planes. The German boy was released, but, as a Jew, Horst was punished. Horst spent the following three months in a Gestapo prison where he was harassed and beaten mercilessly by the Gestapo police. When he was finally released Horst made his way towards a long flight of stairs that would lead to freedom. Before he could make his way to his father, a Gestapo officer kicked him in the shin and sent Horst tumbling down the flight of stairs.

Horst and his father went to a waiting taxicab. But as soon as they got in four or five Gestapo police hurriedly approached the cab and told Horst, his father and the cab driver to step out. Horst dazedly stood back and watched the men burn the cab. The air became thick with smoke, a foreshadowing of the worst yet to come.

Horst was now 14 and the Jews in Essen were already being treated like second-class citizens. They were forced to take on tasks and jobs the Germans did not want. During the bleak months of winter, the Jews had to clean streets littered with snow.

A single Jew was to compile a report of who was working and who was not. They dreaded any encounter with the Gestapo and, when it came time to decide who would deliver the report, everyone became quite apprehensive. Horst, however, was becoming immune to the intimidation techniques of the Gestapo. He volunteered to take the report to the authorities because, after his 3-month prison experience, this seemed like a very miniscule task.

During wartime, Jews living in Germany had to obtain a permit in order to travel not only in and out of the country, but in and out of cities as well. Horst decided he wanted to visit his Aunt who lived in Cologne. He went to see the Commander of the Gestapo. When Horst stepped into his office, the Gestapo recognized him and abruptly asked what he wanted. Before Horst could finish his sentence the Commander interrupted him by saying: "It'll be a cold day in hell the day I give you a permit!"

Horst, being a very persistent 14-year-old, told the Commander he wouldn't leave without a permit in his hands. The Commander continued to do his work while Horst idly sat there like a piece of furniture. When the Commander finally gave up and signed the traveler's permit, Horst walked out of his office, recalling the commander's words about winter in hell.

Horst was about 17 when the Jews were being deported to a concentration camp. His sister Leni and her husband were taken first and sent to the Lodz ghetto in Poland. His father's friend repaired vehicles for the German army; having traveled to and from Germany, he encountered the Lodz Ghetto and saw Leni there. He would occasionally deliver food and clothing to her from her parents. One day, his father's friend made a visit to their house in Essen and upon seeing him, Horst instinctively knew something was wrong. The friend made Horst promise he wouldn't utter a word to his parents and finally told him the story of Leni. He witnessed uniformed S.S. tormenting Jewish mothers to give up their babies. When Leni unflinchingly resisted, the S.S. ripped the baby from her arms and proceeded to kill her and smash the baby to the ground.

Horst understood that this traumatic episode could not be one he shared with his parents. He never once revealed to them about Leni's death; he couldn't bear to let them suffer at the thought of losing their only daughter. He kept this secret like the weight of the world on his shoulders, understanding that it was better for him to suffer alone rather than to watch his parents do the same.

The time had come when all the remaining Jews in Essen would be deported to Auschwitz, the largest concentration camp in German-occupied Poland. The journey to Auschwitz was long and uncomfortable. Thousands were herded like cattle into stuffed open-air boxcars. There was no place to sit and the only way one could urinate was in a bucket, the same bucket everyone else was forced to use. Once they arrived to Auschwitz the Nazis ordered the Jews to remove all their clothes and stand out in the snow until dark.

Shortly after, Horst was separated from his parents as they were instantly herded to their deaths in the gas chambers. There was no time for final hugs or kisses. All that was left was an indelible memory of his loved ones. The remaining Jews had to shower and had their heads and bodies shaved because the Germans were afraid of lice. After they showered and cleaned, they

had to stand in line to be marked with tattoos. To this day, Horst doesn't understand why they received tattoos as Auschwitz was the only camp that authorized them.

Someone once told him that in Judaism one must view the body as a temple, and thus the Germans were purposefully trying to spite this belief by removing each Jew of their individuality. Every act was conducted to strip the Jew of his identity. Their names no longer held any significance, replaced by the tattoos that defined each Jew by a numbers. Some nights it was difficult to tell people apart as everyone had shaven heads and wore the same red-stripped pajamas.

Auschwitz gave the Jews two options: work or die.

If you were too weak to work you would be put to death, which is essentially what happened to the old and feeble, as well as to children. Horst worked. The Germans needed rubber for car tires and, because they were off fighting a war, the Jews in the camps were responsible for making these necessary items in camp-administered factories. Because of this work, he managed to avoid the death selections assigned to those deemed useless by German officers.

Throughout the three years Horst was in Auschwitz, never did the idea of liberation occur to him or to any of the Jews. He was waiting to die…he just didn't know how it would happen or when. As soon as he arrived at Auschwitz, Horst figured the Nazis didn't need any witnesses to the Holocaust so he had expected them to exterminate everyone shortly thereafter.

By January 1945, the Third Reich stood on the verge of military defeat. Most of the German front was already under Soviet Occupation. May of 1945 was an eventful time; the end of the war was approaching which in turn meant that the Holocaust was nearing its end as well.

The Death March was the last episode of the Holocaust. The Germans were hoping most, if not all the Jews, would shred away at some point during the rampant march. 5,000 Jews took part in the symbolic march and only 100 were liberated.

The Russian troops had finally taken over and the S.S. troopers had disappeared. While still being watched by the Russian troops, Horst approached the Russian Commander and asked if he could borrow some clothing. The Russian commander said, "Well, they took yours, why don't you take theirs?" But Horst didn't apply such thinking to his life. Just because they killed his family didn't mean he was going to kill theirs. Horst didn't believe himself to be superior to those who killed his family, but he wasn't inferior either.

Shortly after liberation, Horst moved to Czechoslovakia where he met his wife who helped him find serenity. They moved to the United States with their children and Horst was no longer referred to as unskilled labor but as an Executive Chef. In 1975, the American Culinary Federation honored him for his outstanding talents as a Chef.

Horst wrote to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C., asking for names of people who were liberated from the Death March in his group as a means of

reconnecting with those that once shared his anguish and futility. The director of the museum wrote back to Horst, explaining that he was the only one who had inquired about names of survivors in his particular group because, essentially, he was the only one who had survived.

Throughout everything he has experienced, Horst Cahn maintains one belief: Do not hate. It shouldn't matter where someone is from or what he or she chooses to believe. You mustn't hate. His motto remains, "Do not dwell on the past because the present is a gift." Horst told me he continues to have faith in people because he believes in the power of the human spirit.

Horst, your will to persevere even in the darkest of times makes me believe too.

Assemblymember Nancy Skinner
District 14

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Jacob Harari *Interviewed by Fabiola Gutierrez*

Acknowledgements

Rita Clancy, MSW
Holocaust Survivor Program Coordinator
Jewish Family and Children's Services of the East Bay
Berkeley, CA

Jacob Harari

By Fabiola Gutierrez

Childhood Memories of the Holocaust

"It was four in the morning. We heard loud thunder so we looked out the window. But there were no clouds or anything. It was the German artillery."

When one thinks of childhood years, one thinks of happy days running around freely with friends, smiling, laughing, and maybe, getting into trouble. One thinks of going to school and learning and having fun. What about when the country you are living in is under war and people are being assaulted and killed just for being "different?" Imagine the type of childhood that is given to those kids who live in a place where people are being killed in great numbers for no reason at all.

Mr. Jacob Harari was born June 20, 1932 in Wlodzimierz Wolynski, a city in northwestern Ukraine, which used to be a part of Poland. His father's name was Itzhak Berger, who was born in Wlodzimierz Wolynski. His mother's name was Esther Berger, who was born in Poryck, a town located near Wlodzimierz Wolynski. He had one younger brother named Rafael. The four of them lived in a small house which was just a kitchen and a large room with one big bed and two small beds. The room was divided by a closet. There was also a coal stove to heat the house. There was no bathroom inside their home, instead they had an outhouse. They did have electricity and running water. Attached to the side of their home was the grocery store that Mr. Harari's parents owned. They lived in a mostly Jewish town, but many of their customers were non-Jews from surrounding towns, mostly Ukrainians and Polish. They enjoyed a happy and comfortable middle-class lifestyle.

As a young child, he did not realize the difference between Jews and non-Jews among his friends. Although he does not remember much discrimination in his hometown, there is one moment that stands out in his memory. It was when a Polish man stood outside on the steps of his family's store. He told all non-Jews to not shop there because it was a Jew-owned store. He remembers that his father beat up the guy. However, besides these few incidents, he does not remember much other discrimination.

Mr. Harari attended tarboot, which is a Hebrew School. He remembers all the kids running around or playing ball. Although his parents were not as observant as his grandparents, they did occasionally attend synagogue. They also celebrated Jewish holidays, especially Passover.

Mr. Harari's happy and normal childhood was interrupted on 1941, when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union. He and his brother were visiting their grandparents at Poryck. At four in the morning their sleep was interrupted by loud thundering sounds. It was the German artillery. That same day the Germans burned down the whole town. Two days later, Mr. Harari's mother walked all the way from their home in Wlodzimierz to where his grandparents house used to stand. Since their grandparents home had been burned down, they all walked back

together to his parents' house, which was about twenty-five to thirty miles away. Once they returned home, there was no schooling or business for Jewish people. His family's store was closed down.

Two months later, his grandfather stepped out the house and was taken away by a German truck that randomly took two hundred men. They did not know anything from him until afterwards when they learned that he had unfortunately been taken to a prison where he had been killed.

In 1942 all the Jewish people were rounded up into a ghetto, which was enclosed by barbed wire. Mr. Harari's house was inside the ghetto so they did not have to move. Instead, some of his relatives moved into their house with them. They no longer had their store, but Mr. Harari's father and he would work for the German military sorting food. In return, they would get a loaf of bread every few days. His parents, always suspicious of what the Germans might do, sneaked the boys out of the ghetto and sent them with two different families. However, they ended up having to return home. During a difficult trip home by themselves, they were captured by a Ukrainian policeman, whom they actually knew from before the war. He took them to the German police headquarters where they might have been killed. Luckly, the killings had just stopped and were returned to the ghetto.

When the two brothers returned to their home, they went into the hiding place in the cellar. There they found that there was no more food there in the cellar, which indicated to them that some of the family members might have been hiding there. Mr. Harari then proceeded to the kitchen and looked under the floor where valuables such as his mother's fur coat and silver utensils had been hidden. There he saw his father's head sticking out from the hiding place. His father told them that his family had hid in there for a few days but, after running out of food, they decided to escape through a creek. His father had now returned for the valuables so that he could give them as pay to someone man to hide them in his attic. He built a fake wall about ten feet from the real wall so no one would be suspicious. However, once they ran out of money, he would no longer helped them.

Mr. Harari's mother then decided to ask a Polish lady named Lydia for help. They did not trust her very much because she had betrayed them once before. However, she allowed them to stay in her cellar for a while. Afterwards she had to move. However, she found a place where she could continue to hide Mr. Harari and his family. It was a three-story building and she rented the basement apartment. The apartment had an unfinished barn and under that they built the hiding place. Mr. Harari described it as being only about eight feet wide. They bordered it and then covered it with soil. The entrance was a small metal container with a little opening that one could stick their hand out to smooth out the dirt over the opening. They built a tunnel that they could get out of to get into yard in case the building was blown up. Their toilet was usually just a bucket that the lady would then dump out. They dug up a little well through which water would come in through. It was not the best water, but it was drinkable.

They ate only wheat and potatoes and could cook only if someone in the apartments was also cooking as they might be descovered from the smoke. Mr. Harari came up with the idea of placing a small mirror in the chimney so the could see when other people were cooking. They

lived under these conditions from 1942 until June of 1944. They shared this small space that was only big enough for someone to sit down in with three extra people. When the Soviets finally returned and they were able to come out, their feet were swollen and they had to be very careful with what they ate, other than wheat and potatoes.

His mother worked for a restaurant and his father worked for the housing authority again. They moved to Warsaw and then Palestine. They took a Polish surname and he went to school as a Pole. In May 1948, when the war broke out between Arabs and Jews over Palestine, he and the other high school boys were sent to war for six months. After completing high school, he returned to the Air Force.

In 1952, he left to study at New York University for two years, until lack of money sent him to a university in Detroit. There, he became a civil engineer. In Detroit he met his wife and married. In 1969, Mr. Harari joined the US Army Corps of Engineers and when a spot was opened up in San Francisco, he moved here, after having worked in Seattle for seven years.

Today, Mr. Harari lives in Berkeley, California with his wife, Rena Harari. He has one son, one daughter, and one granddaughter. He has been retired since 1969. Mr. Harari values family more than anything else. He is very grateful and happy that he was able to provide them with a good life. As a result of the Holocaust he did not have a normal childhood - he had to grow up faster and lost all his family except for his immediate family. Mr. Harari is not bitter, though. He has learned that one cannot live with anger. He also says that the people of today are not to be blamed for what their parents or grandparents might have done. The only thing that upsets him is the fact that some people today still try to deny that the Holocaust ever happened, despite all the proof that exists. This proves that he is not only strong, but also is a great man with a great heart and a very positive mindset. Despite all the difficulties he has had to live through, he has been able to take all of that and use it to make today seem the best life he could ask for, for his family and for himself.

Assemblymember Sandré Swanson
District 16

Is honored to present the stories of Holocaust survivors

Helen Fixler — *Interviewed by Yesenia Rascon*

Leonard Fixler — *Interviewed by Anna Pickrell and Sarah Sachs*

Acknowledgements

Rabbi Mark S. Bloom
Temple Beth Abraham
Oakland, CA

Dr. Murray Cohen, Head of School
The College Preparatory School
Oakland, CA

Helen Fixler

By Yesenia Rascon

Almost Too Young to Remember, Never Too Young to Forget

Helen Fixler was born Helen Nudler in the small city of Mlynow, Poland in 1927 into a family of five. Helen's family consisted of three older brothers, one younger sister, and her parents. Helen's father was in the grain business, while her mother was a housewife. She went to a public elementary school, and in the afternoons, she went to Hebrew school. Her community didn't necessarily have a great love for Jewish people, but they were tolerant. Helen had no complaints about her childhood - it was simple and happy, surrounded by those she loved. In 1939, everything changed.

In 1939, the war broke out, and the Russians temporarily occupied Poland. Helen was forced to go to a Russian school, but Helen knew that if the Russians were already here, that the Germans were on their way. She didn't even really know about the Nazi movement, considering just how young she was, but she knew it was out to get her. Helen and her family lived in constant fear that any day, the Germans would march into their home and evict them. This fear became a reality in 1941, when the Germans moved them to a ghetto. Helen was about 13. Her entire family lived in one room, and, with the exception of her little sister, they were all forced to do work. They all worked either out in the fields or indoors doing laundry or dishes - all with the hope of getting a piece of bread that night. They lived in the ghetto for about 7 or 8 months, but finally, one day, they all escaped.

Helen said that when her family ran away from the ghetto, they didn't really know where they were going; they only knew that anything would be better than living in that horror. Almost anything. The Nudlers ran out to the woods of Ukraine, but Ukraine was working with Germany. While in the woods, the Nudlers would stay in a bunker during the day, out of fear of being seen by the Germans, and at night, they would go to a nearby village to ask for food. While the Nudlers were lucky in the sense that the farmers almost always gave them food, some of their friends were not so lucky; the farmers would sometimes report those Jews to the Germans, and those friends would never come back to the woods. The Nudlers stayed in the woods for many winters and many summers. The winters were especially hard because they were so cold, but the summers were also hard because they were confined in a hot bunker all day. One summer, while the Nudlers were out picking fruits from the trees, the Germans saw them - and shot at them. Each member of the family ran in a different direction, but only two members survived: Helen and her father. However, Helen did not know this at the time, since she was running in the opposite direction of him. Helen was a 14 year old girl, alone in the woods, with nowhere to go.

Helen lived with several partisans in the woods until she found her father a few weeks after the incident. After finally reuniting with him, they both decided to leave the woods. She, her father, and a group of friends moved across a river and went to another village. Helen and her father lived in a hole filled with hay under a lady's home; the lady did not tell her husband she was housing two Jews, as he would not approve. They lived in the hole for 6 to 8 months, until their liberation in 1944.

After Helen's liberation in 1944, she and her father went back to Mlynow, surprised to see that their house was still there. After spending a few weeks at home, Helen and her father went to Germany, to a displaced persons camp. They had plans to come to the United States and stay with some distant relatives, but sadly, her father didn't make it. Instead, Helen went to Canada in 1948 and stayed there until 1957. It was there that she met her husband, Leonard, on a blind date. In 1957, she and her husband moved to the United States. Currently, they have 2 daughters, one deceased son, and 6 grandchildren, all of whom know her incredible story. She has been in Oakland, California for over 30 years and she currently works for a travel agency.

While telling me her story, Helen often said she didn't understand why she was so lucky. At many points during her Holocaust experience, she wanted to die; she was tired, cold, and hungry and didn't want to do it anymore. Her father was the only thing that kept her going, but he, like so many others, also died. She sometimes wonders why she was special, and why she was saved. The Holocaust is always on her mind; she dreams about it frequently, and sometimes feels as though someone is still chasing her. She doesn't understand how something so horrible and inhumane was allowed to happen, and she hopes and prays it never happens again. We are "all God's children", and that should be enough.

Helen strongly believes that the Holocaust must be taught and never forgotten. It is important for people to be aware of what happened. Helen is aware that the Holocaust survivors left are dying out, but she hopes that with projects such as this one, the Holocaust will continue to be remembered. And I hope it does too.

Leonard Fixler

By Anna Pickrell and Sarah Sachs

Nourishing the Body and Soul for Survival

Born on September 12, 1922 to a family of sixteen children from two mothers, Leonard Fixler grew up in a Czechoslovakian town in which religious tolerance was never questioned before the rise of Nazism. Living amongst 40,000 other Jews – not a majority for the area – Leonard led "a beautiful life" in which his religion was, to the best of his knowledge, irrelevant when it came to the question of coexistence. Teachers accompanied Jewish students to temple, business owners thrived without religious setbacks, and the town lived under a general blanket of peace for the first seventeen years of Leonard's life. Hitler had no place in this Czech town – though the Third Reich was big news everywhere. Schools in Leonard's hometown chose not to discuss the current events of political Europe in class. "School was a different ballgame then…We never discussed foreign things in school," says Leonard. The chalkboards had no room for a man so revolting and a political war zone so unstable.

1939 was a turning point for Leonard; not the kind of turning point that we think of today, not a positive transition into his imminent adulthood. 1939 marked the Hungarian invasion of Czechoslovakia. Two days after the initial invasion, Hitler declared Bohemia and Moravia, one of three main Czechoslovakian provinces, a German protectorate, thus forcing Emil Hácha, President of the Second Republic, to surrender. Faced with a fight or flight situation (though, in the end, the Czech government showed little resistance), Leonard fled to Budapest, where he stayed in hiding for four years.

The days that passed between 1939 and 1943 were ones of complete isolation in which Leonard "didn't go nowhere [and] couldn't trust nobody." For fear of being caught by Nazis, Leonard "never revealed his nationality" while in Budapest and concealed his Judaism with all of the willpower that he could muster. Forced to leave school at such a young age, Leonard spent his time in hiding, educating himself with newspaper clippings and war propaganda from which he eventually learned to speak six languages. With scarce access to radios and news stations, Leonard was generally unable to stay informed of the progression of the war and the well being of the family members from whom he had been separated.

In 1943, Leonard was caught by Hungarian officials and immediately sent to Romania to work in a labor camp, where he remained for one year before being sent to Austria via boxcar. The working conditions in this camp were unfathomably rough – after working from sunrise to sunset, prisoners were forced to sleep in crowded barracks in which many people drew their final breaths. The guards in the camps came across as disinterested enemies, and the lack of food led to a hunger that Leonard does not wish upon any human being. "Every day I got such a beating. They kicked me and beat me…but when you're hungry you'll do anything. Nobody should know what hunger means. Even now…hunger is the worst thing in the world."

Thinking back to this time of continuous manual labor, inhumane living conditions, and freezing cold temperatures, Leonard has few words to summarize his experience. "It was very

rough," is what first comes to his lips, but the horrors of the images themselves speak for the words that he cannot seem to form.

In 1944, the Russians came to Leonard's labor camp in Romania and sent the workers to another camp on the Austrian-Hungarian border. Leonard recalls how crowded and uncomfortable the train ride to Austria was. With over 100 people in a car, Leonard spent the entire train ride shoulder to shoulder with strangers in conditions not dissimilar from his own already deteriorating physical state. "You couldn't sit, you couldn't stand up," he recalls.

When Leonard's train made a stop in Budapest to let in another ten workers, he was both lucky and stunned to be randomly reunited with his brother, who he had not seen since 1941. Counting each new passenger one at a time, horrified by the subsequent decrease in breathing room, Leonard felt relief for the first time in years when he recognized the fifth face to board the train. From here, Leonard and his brother stayed together through the next few years of the war, struggling to survive – but struggling together.

Upon arriving at his new labor camp, Leonard found conditions to be hauntingly similar to those at the camp he had just left. "The food was awful, there was hardly any food. It was bitter cold… [we had] no clothing, nothing." Living in tents piled tight with twenty workers each, Leonard and his fellow victims found their only light in one another. "We huddled together…and that's how we kept warm," he says. "There was no restroom, only graves…and there were a lot of dead people every morning, people who had tried to escape."

After working in the labor camp for some time, Leonard and 1500 others from his camp were sent on a death march that eventually ended at another camp in Austria. Walking in the masses, Leonard was forced to walk all day with armed Nazis shepherding the crowd from trucks. In April, the march approached what was then the tallest mountain in Austria. It was here, where the Nazis began to open fire on the victims of the death march and "shoot like animals." Leonard recalls being up to his knees in snow with "everything red." While running through the open fire in an attempt to escape, Leonard was unable to avoid the guards and was momentarily put at gunpoint; a moment that he was sure meant the end of his life. In the end, Leonard managed to escape the gun and all of the havoc created by the massacre; though to this day, he does not know just how he survived.

After the march, Leonard spent six days in a concentration camp, where every minute of every day he "could smell the smoke from the chimneys." While the Jews were told they would be given food, Leonard does not recollect getting anything at all from the Nazis. After six days, Americans began to approach the area and Leonard and the other prisoners were relocated to a camp in Gumskerheim. The march left room for little food and water; "The only water you got was the rain," Leonard remembers, and on the most desperate of days, "We ate snails from the ground."

On one particularly brutal day, Leonard chose rebellion over hunger. Aware that he was endangering his life, Leonard broke the line and ran to a nearby bakery where he begged for food until the German woman in charge finally granted him sympathy in the form of a few raw potatoes. On his way back into line, an SS soldier spotted Leonard. Much like his moment at

gunpoint on the mountain, Leonard felt that this was the end, that there was no way out of this one. But for some inexplicable reason, the soldier gave Leonard what was then considered just a small slap on the wrist – he beat Leonard over the back of his neck with his gun and pushed him back into line, allowing him to find his brother and enjoy the food that he had smuggled into his pockets.

Once in Gumskerheim, Leonard only spent a short time in the new camp. One day, as he remembers, a group of German soldiers began to throw cigarettes around the boundaries of the camp, a sign that Americans were coming and the Germans would soon be forced to surrender. But, as Leonard soon found out, the Americans were unable to enter the camp due to the typhus outbreak that was taking lives left and right. Leonard and his brother decided that now was the time to attempt an escape, so the two of them ran away to the nearest metropolitan city. Upon arrival in the city, Leonard took his brother back to the bakery where he had originally asked for food. He begged the woman for salvation and was eventually invited in. Here, Leonard and his brother spent three days with the woman, spending every minute eating and sleeping - luxuries they had not fully experienced or appreciated since the years before the war.

Eventually, Leonard and his brother wore out their welcome in the woman's bakery, around which time they found a bus that was heading back to their home country. Upon reaching the Czech border, however, the passengers were prohibited from entering the country due to unstable interior conditions. Thus unable to go home, Leonard and his brother found temporary respite in the home of an uncommonly hospitable German woman, with whom they planned to stay until the fighting in Czechoslovakia ended. The German woman fed the men well, hydrated them, and kept them in her attic – the only place in the house that was safe from her son, who, Leonard quickly found, was a Nazi.

Unfortunately, Leonard and his brother were both infected with typhus while staying with the German woman and were taken to get medical attention in a hospital that was filled with injured German soldiers, thus making it impossible for Leonard and his brother to reveal anything about their religion despite the imminent end of the war. Leonard recollects that priests used to come and pray over the patients, including him and his brother. "He put a big cross on my neck and prayed over me day and night," he says. While in the hospital, Leonard was taken to pray in a Catholic church on Sunday mornings. Afraid to reveal their true identity, Leonard and his brother secretly performed Jewish prayer rituals, staying devoted to the religion from which they had been banned for so many years.

Once healed, Leonard and his brother returned home to Czechoslovakia. With the knowledge that he would never be seeing this hospital again, Leonard gathered the courage before his journey home to admit his religion to those who had taken care of him. When told to keep the holy cross gifted to him by his priest, Leonard confessed to his nurse, "Sister, I'm a Jew."

Once home, Leonard and his brother were not surprised by the absence of their family and friends. Unable to settle on the idea that he would never see his family again, Leonard set out to reconnect with as many familiar faces as possible. Every morning, he would rush to the train station and just wait for anyone he recognized, only to be let down day after day. Finally,

Leonard managed to reunite with his sister, who lived in a nearby city. "I got off the train; it was 3:00 in the morning. She lived on the fourth floor. I rang the bell, she asked me who was there, and I said, 'It's your brother, Leonard.' She almost jumped from the fourth floor, she couldn't believe it," he recollects. Leonard's sister passed away in Cleveland three years ago, but his memory of that day marks a bold spot in his mind.

Leonard learned from his sister that eight of his siblings had survived the war, but that the other half had perished along with their parents, who were taken to Auschwitz in 1944 and never seen by their children again. Today, three of those eight are still alive – with one sister in Israel, another in Cleveland, and Leonard himself in Oakland.

In 1948, the Russians attempted to draft Leonard into the army. After all that he had been through – the hunger, the illnesses, and the loss of so many loved ones – Leonard's last desire was to aid the war, no matter which side he took. To avoid the army, Leonard escaped to Germany, where he lived in a Displaced Persons Camp. While in the camp, Leonard enlisted in the American Labor Supervision Company, which gave him the opportunity to move to Canada in 1949.

In Canada, Leonard was very cold and wanted to move to be with his family in the United States. While living in Canada, Leonard had joined a bowling league as a source of recreation – on his last night with this group of men, a friend convinced Leonard to meet his sister, Helen, just for one last round of fun before his departure. So Leonard took the advice and the two went out to the movies. "It was a Saturday night, [and we saw] *Waterloo Bridge*…A love story all the way," he recalls. That night, Helen invited Leonard to go to a wedding the next day. The couple spent the night dancing and had a wonderful time, so much so that Leonard delayed his departure – which was planned for the next morning – by one more week and continued to take her out. "I just changed my mind," he says. Two months later, Leonard married Helen, the absolute love of his life.

In January 1957, Leonard and Helen moved to the US, where they started a dry cleaners and men's clothing store, had two children and six grandchildren, and settled down in the house in which they still reside, 45 years later. Though Canada was their first real home after the war, the US means the world to them both. "People should kiss the ground here," Leonard and Helen agreed, "This is the best country in the world…If you're willing to work you can do anything. People don't appreciate that."

Though Leonard has taken his retirement as a chance to travel the world with his wife, he has not been back to his hometown since his return near the end of the war. Now unable to trust strangers due to his scarring experiences during the war, Leonard worries that his home is no longer safe to visit, for the people and the places have changed so much since the war that they are now foreign to him. "Don't trust no strangers, because they are full of lies. They lied to us," he says. Without the ability to trust strangers, Leonard suggests that children today should "take care of [their] education…and honor [their] parents."

Leonard understands that the specific details of his story are not the take-home message. Every Holocaust story is somehow different from the next, but, for Leonard, the part that we

must always remember is the potential of any human being to live on through motivation. "A human being is stronger than a horse, understand? You just need will power," he says. And yes, he says, in times like these "you miss your parents, your family…but life must go on."

That remembrance must go on to the end of time; if it does not, Leonard fears that we may repeat history in the most terrible of ways. "It was a terrible thing, I don't wish it upon nobody in the world…You know what they say: 'Never again, never again.' I don't wish it on my worst enemy to live through what we lived through."

Assemblymember Tom Torlakson
District 11

Is honored to present the story of Holocaust survivor

Susanne *Interviewed by Clarisse Ruszel*

Acknowledgements

Rita Clancy, MSW
Holocaust Survivor Program Coordinator
Jewish Family and Children's Services of the East Bay
Berkeley, CA

Susanne

By Clarisse Ruszel

I Will Never Forget…

Susanne will never forget that the morning after Kristallnacht, when the German soldiers rioted in the cities. It was her chore to clean the toilets at her all girls' school. She will never forget the image of her defeated father and his destroyed store. She will never forget the Christmas Eve of 1938 when she and her little sister left Germany for Sweden. Susanne also hopes that the rest of the world will never forget the horrible atrocities that occurred in Europe during the Holocaust.

Susanne grew up in the town of Oppeln in Germany. Oppeln is now part of southwestern Poland. Her family consisted of her father, mother, and younger sister. Susanne's father owned a store at which both her parents worked. As a child, she could often feel the enmity of the Germans towards her because of her faith. She began to feel even more hostility as she got older and became the only Jewish child in her class. She was a good student, but the public school in town had orders not to allow Jewish students to progress. It was very frustrating to her because she wished to do well and passed her grade but was told that she would have to be held back.

One incident stands out in her mind. She was very good in French and another girl in her class asked if she could copy her test. Susanne allowed her to copy and their teacher found out. She automatically assumed that it had been Susanne who had copied the other girl because "German girls wouldn't do that." The German girl didn't have the nerve to correct the teacher, and Susanne received a failing grade. Susanne found that it was especially difficult to deal with such unfairness as a child because children have little defense.

Her mother was very devout in her religion and did not understand why the Germans hated them. Susanne had told her parents for many years that they needed to leave Germany. She used to tell her mother, "They are going to kill me!" Her parents were unable to believe that people could possibly be so horrible, especially when they did not feel the hatred themselves. The only people who shopped at their store were those that liked them. Susanne's mother and father lived most of their lives under the Kaiser and considered the Germans to be good people. It is understandable that they would find it difficult to fear the Germans, as what rational person would think that other people could be so cruel?

After realizing that Susanne would not get anywhere by continuing to go to the local German school, her parents sent her to a housekeeping school for Jewish girls when she was fourteen. She boarded at the school which was in Breslow, Poland. During her time at this school was the beginning of the end for the Jewish people of Europe. Susanne remembers clearly the events leading up to Kristallnacht. On October 28, 1938, thousands of Polish Jews were sent out of Germany to Poland. The Polish border guards refused to take them in and the unfortunate people were sent back and forth between Germany and Poland in the freezing cold. The son of one such couple was living in Paris at the time. The son became infuriated and on November 7

bought a gun and went to the German embassy to kill the head of the embassy. However, this man was not in, so the son asked to see an embassy official and promptly shot him.

The embassy official died two days later and on the night of November 9, 1938, Hitler gave orders to the Nazi troopers to burn the synagogues. On the morning of November 10, Susanne woke up to a cold morning, ate breakfast, and was assigned her morning chore as usual. That morning it was her unfortunate luck to have to clean the toilets. She walked into the bathroom and heard the sound of someone crying bitterly. One of the commuting students was sitting in the bathroom sobbing. Susanne asked her what had happened and the girl told her that the synagogues were burning. Susanne was shocked and frightened as they went to join the other girls. All of the commuting students had horrid tales to tell of the retched things they had witnessed on their way to school that morning.

Later that day the woman in charge of the school approached Susanne, stating that she had an important job for her. The school was on the upper levels of a building that also served as a retirement home. In the night, the Nazis had cut the phone lines and the elderly people were unable to contact their families. The headmistress informed Susanne that she "didn't look so Jewish" as the other girls. She asked her to take the elderly people back to their families. Susanne was given their addresses and escorted them through the streets of Breslow to their families. On the journey she was yelled at and asked if she was ashamed to be a Jew. Many people also threw beer bottles at them.

That same day her mother sent her a letter by express mail, which arrived the same day that it was sent. Her mother assured her that everything was fine at home, but in reality all was not okay. Susanne's mother came to pick her up and they returned to Oppeln. Her sister was already home and the morning after Kristallnacht had run home from school with another Jewish girl. They were afraid, especially after an exceptionally nasty German girl threatened to make them eat dirt.

The morning after Kristallnacht their maid had arrived and told Susanne's mother that their store was ruined. Her mother simply brushed it off as drunks, but the maid insisted that it was far worse. Her father went with a neighbor to check on their stores. The Nazis were standing outside of her father's store. He abruptly turned and went home. The neighbor continued on to his store and ended up being taken to the concentration camps that very day. Her father had escaped the camps this time.

Her family was very lucky because the landlord of their building had heard about what was going to happen the night of November 9. He removed their family's name from the entryway of the apartment building. Because of this, the Germans did not immediately suspect that a Jewish family lived there.

Susanne returned home to her defeated father. He was sitting and shaking, as his life's work had been completely destroyed. He told her that he had been waiting for her return so that she could go with him to try and clean up the store. Her father had not wanted to take her mother because he did not want her to see such devastation. The mess of the store was almost unspeakable. Merchandise was all over the place and the huge glass counter had been destroyed

and cut the hands of the Nazis, so there was blood everywhere. Susanne and her father tried to clean up, but it was an almost futile task.

By this time the phone lines had been turned back on. Mainly, Susanne believes, because people from outside Germany were complaining and the Nazis did not want to look bad to the rest of the world. Susanne's mother called her at the store and told her exciting news. Her uncle, a Berlin scientist with many international connections, had received multiple visas for his family to leave Germany. He offered to give up his children's place on a children's transport to Sweden so that Susanne and her sister could leave.

The transport was to leave on Christmas Eve of 1938. However, when Susanne and her family arrived, they found out that the transport had been cancelled. Her mother was advised that she should still send Susanne and her sister to Sweden as it may be their only chance to leave. She gave Susanne the option and Susanne knew that she had to leave. She could no longer bear to live in Germany, and this was her chance to get out. Susanne was fifteen and her sister was twelve when they boarded the train in Berlin. They traveled to the Baltic Sea and boarded a boat bound for Sweden. She and her sister had never been on a boat before, and the waters were rough in the middle of winter.

The girls ended up in Stockholm, Sweden. They were not overly happy in Sweden, but they were alive. Susanne at first lived with a woman to help her with housework. The lady was not very kind and Susanne eventually ended up in various foster homes. Her sister lived with a kind woman who would allow Susanne to stay over sometimes. When Susanne turned eighteen she was able to live on her own, and this was the best situation that she had the entire time in Sweden. She and her sister would also take vacations together as they got older.

After the war, Susanne did everything she could to find out what had happened to her parents. They had been trying to leave Germany and actually received many visas, but all of them fell through. It was simply much too late to leave. She found out that they had both been taken to Auschwitz. Her father had apparently had a great chance of survival, but he found out that his wife had died. He no longer wanted to live and decided to let himself starve. The plan had always been that Susanne, her sister and her parents would all meet up in the United States. Susanne and her sister received visas through relatives in New York. She and her sister left Sweden together for America.

Susanne still owns a doll that she played with in her childhood. Her children and grandchildren are very interested in hearing stories if her experiences. Her daughter used to become so horrified by what her mother had been through that she didn't like to hear about it. Susanne and her husband enjoyed traveling and he wished to see where she had grown up. She agreed to go back to Oppeln, but did not want to look up anyone that she had known as a child. The town is still beautiful, and when Susanne told the mayor her story, he was so moved that he almost cried.

Susanne will never forget the effects the Holocaust had on her life. She is so thankful to her uncle to this day for giving her and her sister the opportunity to leave. It is still difficult for her to understand how such a horrible thing could have been allowed. How could people be so

cruel? She and her sister were lucky to escape, as so many Jewish people became trapped in Europe. It upsets her that so many people have to live with such horrid memories, but she is glad that at least some justice has been done.

Assemblymember Mike Villines
District 29

Is honored to present the stories of World War II veteran

Joe Rivas *Interviewed by Elizabeth Kuykendall*

Acknowledgements

Paul Loeffler
Host of Hometown Heroes and KMJ Sports Director
KMJ Radio 580 AM
Fresno, CA

Joe Rivas

By Elizabeth Kuykendall

All the Victims of the Holocaust

In a quiet neighborhood in East Fresno, there lives a man who has seen things that you and I will never fully understand. His name is Joe Rivas, and in 1945 his Infantry Division came to the Nordhausen concentration camp to bring liberation, but left it with the first-hand knowledge of humanity at its worst, and an underlying confusion about who the real enemy was. This is his story.

Imagine if you will, that it is the summer of 1943 and you have just been drafted to fight in a war against an enemy whose acts are depicted as so horrific that you and most of your friends believe the stories are products of the Allied propaganda machine rather than a true reflection of German actions. Joe is 21 when he deploys by ship to eventually land on Omaha Beach, and his career starts with an assignment to the 692nd Tank Destroyer Battalion. He is in charge of firing the 76mm half-crack gun. His job requires him to fire on the German troops 5km across the Roer River in Belgium. "Fire for effect" he hears, and continues shooting until he hears "cease fire, mission accomplished." He never sees who it is that he is firing on, and he doesn't ever know what mission it is that gets accomplished. He doesn't think about the casualties but just does his job and hopes to make it through another day alive.

As he fights amidst the confusion that is war, he suddenly finds his squad trapped in a pocket of the Roer Valley, completely surrounded by the German S.S. (Schutzstaffel, translated as the "Protective Squadron"). Encircled where no provisions can reach them and Joe eats his K rations sparingly as the days wear on. This fight will later be known as the Battle of the Bulge; a major element of the German plan to split the British and American Allied line in half and then encircle and destroy them, forcing the Allies to negotiate a peace treaty. The Germans' objectives were not realized, but with over 19,000 Americans killed, the Battle of the Bulge was the single largest and bloodiest battle that American forces experienced in World War II.

After the German defeat, Joe joins the 104th "Timberwolf" Division and travels to Aachen Germany for Infantry training. As he continues to support expansion of the U.S.'s occupation of Germany, Joe finds himself traveling in a 375 mile penetration through Germany. He becomes a scout and takes point as his squad travels from town to town. Most of the villages they travel through are empty when the 104th arrives. The SS is fleeing from the approaching American troops, and the villagers have quickly found that to stay in the middle of the two warring factions is to die. Joe is fired on occasionally while he is scouting. During one October day in 1944, a shell lands at his feet and he pauses to see if his journey will end there. Incredibly, it doesn't detonate and so like the good soldier he is, he continues on with his job.

The nights are the worst for Joe and his men so far from home. It is winter and the temperatures are freezing. When they can, they take shelter in the basements of homes deserted by civilians fleeing the two opposing armies. When they can't find abandoned homes or barns, they dig foxholes 3 feet into the ground and then cover themselves with dirt and vegetation after

crawling in to avoid detection. Sometimes they sleep in abandoned German foxholes. It is hard for Joe to sleep because of the "screaming mimis," which was what he and his squad called the sound the shells made as they flew over their heads all through the night. Joe does worry about the increased danger of being a scout, but he works with a partner and they look out for each other. In one of the villages they travel through, he signals to his partner when he notices flashes of light in an upstairs window. The lights are flashes from a machine gun and, just as they prepare to dive to the street for cover, a white flag comes waving out of the window in surrender. They live to see another day.

In March of 1945, Joe's Division advances into yet another village. The Germans rain shells down on his troop and they are forced to pull back. Serving as point, Joe is left behind and takes shelter in an abandoned building. A shell detonates just outside of the building and the windows all shatter, shredding his hand into a bloody mess. As he tries to leave the village, the civilians stop him and bring him into their homes where they feed him onion soup and dress his wounds. After many civilian encounters, Joe feels that the U.S. has come to liberate not only the Jews, but also the Germans; the people of the country forced into their circumstances by an evil dictator. The civilians he meets are grateful and say they feel the troops bring liberation. They have lived under the oppression of a dictatorship government, but still seem like regular human beings with stories and families, just like his own. He understands during this time that not all Germans are bad. When he finally returns to his troop, he is offered a Purple Heart for his injuries, but he refuses it. One badge he does receive is the Combat Infantry Badge for his exchange of hostile fire in combat actions against enemy ground forces from the Roer to the Rhine river. They want to make him sergeant that day but he refuses it as well. He becomes instead second in command of the squad.

The 104th continues to advance the U.S. occupation in a slow trek from town to town. As they marched in to occupy towns, a strange thing begins to happen. The German troops begin walking back into the deserted towns by the thousands with their hands on their heads in surrender. They throw their weapons down into a huge pile that, in many towns, grows to be several feet tall. They surrender because they are hungry and have nowhere else to go with the Soviet Union closing in on them from the East. Joe notices and wonders at the many S.S. uniforms they find littering the ground. It occurs to him now that the men either discarded the uniforms in fear of being taken prisoner by the Allies, or other soldiers removed them from the dead so their bodies would be left in peace.

In April of 1945, Joe and his infantry walk into the town of Nordhausen, a concentration camp for those too weak or sick to work in the nearby tunnels of Dora on the V1 and V2 rockets, which were first launched on D-Day in 1944. The town was later known as "vernichtungslager," an extermination camp. Of the 6,000 inmates in Nordhausen, Joe's division find over 5,000 rotting corpses as they arrive that day. The German guards had made the inmates lie down in rows and ordered them to stay there in their filth until they starved to death. Joe finds them, dead and dying, their bodies littering the ground as far as he can see. He had heard that camps like this existed, but didn't really believe it, and had never seen one before that day. As he walks through the town that first day, he notices that the Nazi flag still flies from a second story window. As German sniper shots whiz around him in a last ditch resistance attempt, Joe climbs up into the attic and brings the flag down, symbolizing the end of the Nazi's reign of terror. He asks 23

members of the 104th and 414th divisions to sign the flag that day. Joe stays in Nordausen for a few days where his job is to patrol inside the "caves" (the tunnels of Dora). There he finds over 100 slaves, all of them women and children. The German civilians were a huge help in the clearing of Nordhausen, and he is glad to have helped to liberate not only the Jews, but the Germans as well. For Joe, it is a difficult war to understand once he begins talking to the surrendered S.S. The line between the good guy and the bad guy is convoluted by forced duty.

By the end of the war, 6 long years after it began, Hitler's army had killed 2 out of every 3 Jews in their occupied areas as part of the Nazi's "Final Solution" to annihilate the Jewish people. Over seventy million people were killed, the majority civilians, making it the deadliest conflict in human history. Looking back over the 13 months Joe spent fighting in Germany, he says it was hard for him to feel anything in the face of such immense carnage. He speculates survival requires the human mind to put up a defensive wall when faced with the horrors of genocide. The 104th Division fought 195 consecutive days of battle, more consecutive days than any other Division. By the end of those 195 days, over 13,400 soldiers of the Division were killed, wounded, or missing in action.

Joe says he is not a hero and that he was just doing his job; but we know better. As he lies in bed on his quiet street in East Fresno with the signed Nazi flag folded up in his closet, I hope he realizes the lessons his heroism has taught us. I am glad he has reminded us of the many different victims of the Holocaust; the survivors, the German civilians, and the liberators, who will all carry the scars of this war for the rest of their lives. A French Survivor named Jean Mialet said of the war, "This is what Hell must be like." Joe Rivas was discharged Jan 16th, 1946, with a Combat Infantry Badge, four medals, and a bronze star. This is his story, and it is one of duty, courage, and lasting humanity.

Gitta Ginsberg with
Mollie Aberle

John Odenheimer with Nicole
Kowtko and Nathan Coleman

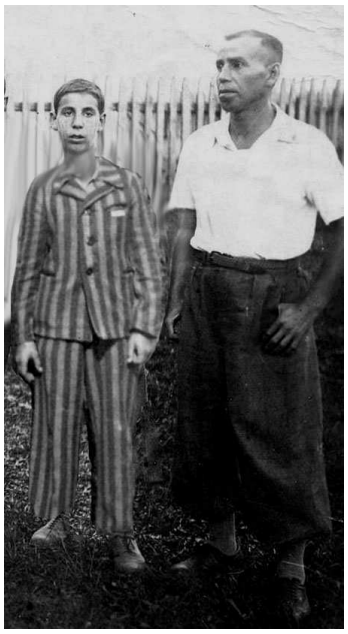
Steven Kovary

Eda Lew Balsam with her family

Ezra Klug

John S. Gordon with
David Josephson

Liz Igra

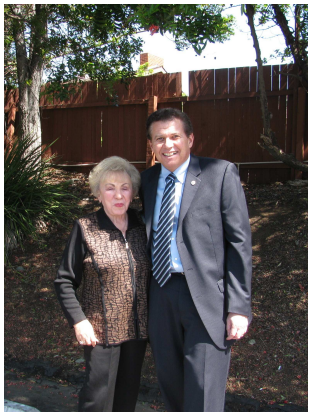


Bernard Marks with his father in 1945

Joe Rivas

Irma Broclawski

Renee Tully



Gussie Zaks with Assemblymember Marty Block

Benjamin Midler with Marissa Zebold and Brianca Onori

Jack Illes